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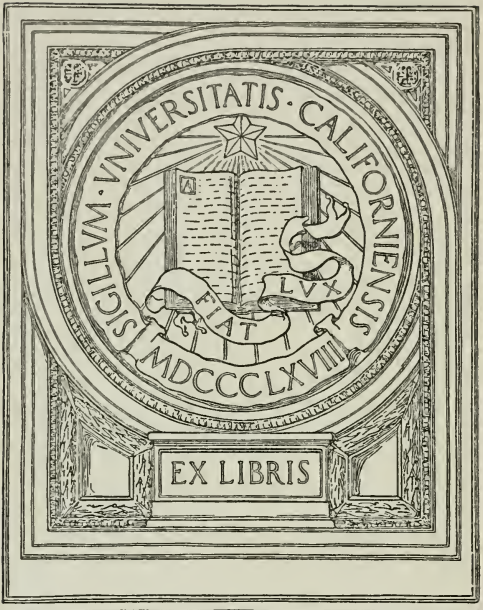
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A PRINCE OF TEACHERS

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Vittorino in sight of the ancient city of Padua. [p. 29

VITTORINO DA FELTRE

A PRINCE OF TEACHERS

BY

A SISTER OF NOTRE DAME

SECOND EDITION

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A PRINCE OF TEACHERS

CHAPTER I

EARLY YEARS AT FELTRE

IT was the year of our Lord 1378, and the land was lovely Italy. The snow-crowned summits of the Venetian Alps looked down upon the little white city of Feltre, nestling in the security of its fortifications on a green hillside of one of their lower slopes. The battlemented turrets stood boldly out against the clear blue sky, and the lordly castle, flanked by a massive square keep, seemed to bid defiance to any rash foe who should dare to ascend the hill in hostile array.

The warm Italian sun shone brightly upon the picturesque old city, just as it had shone in bygone centuries while Roman legions and barbarian invaders in flashing armour, had passed to their wars along

the ancient road below. At present, however, all was in peace, as if to do honour to a little guest who had just entered a world which he was to adorn by becoming one of the most saintly and distinguished men of his time.

Bruto de' Rambaldoni, of whose son Vittorino we are about to tell the story, was a notary in his native city. Though of noble Italian stock, the family had fallen into poverty, and it was with no small difficulty that ends could be made to meet when work was slack and the notary's pen was at a standstill. At such times clouds would gather, only to be dispelled by the strong faith and deep religious feeling which animated the lives of Bruto and his pious wife, Monda.

On the present occasion, however, troubles were forgotten, and all was joy in the household, for the darling "bambino" had just been brought back from the baptistery, where a name of hopeful augury had been given to him.

Whether his victories were to be those of war, or the nobler ones of peace, was yet

unknown; but the verdict left to posterity has now been decided in favour of the latter. The little Rambaldoni was to grow up an honour alike to his family and his birthplace, and to mankind in general, and was to be known to future generations as the great scholar, the prince of teachers, Vittorino da Feltre.

In the sunshine of his mother's smiles the bambino grew apace. The first words he learnt to pronounce were the holy names of Jesus and Mary, and early lessons of piety and virtue were instilled into his soul, where, like tender plants, they were cherished and encouraged to expand in the pure and strong atmosphere of a typical Catholic home.

One of the first fruits of Monda's precepts and example was the impression made upon the child by the sight of human suffering. A delicate compassion and pity for the poor and weak was an heirloom of more value to Vittorino than treasures of gold, and silver, and precious stones. Never throughout his life did he fail to practise that Christian charity towards the

unfortunate which he had seen carried to a heroic degree in his parents' house at Feltre. It is true that there was little to give, but to that little the poor were always welcome, and ready sympathy and a helping hand often made up for the cold alms of less charitable donors.

The notary saw with pleasure that his little son gave promise of uncommon talent. In his leisure hours he would devote himself to teaching the boy his letters, and to guiding his tiny hand in forming the written characters. It was soon time to place him at the Cathedral school, and once there, Vittorino made rapid progress. The spirit of emulation was strong within him, so that he was never behindhand in his work, and was always first in his class.

He mastered the elements of Latin grammar in an incredibly short time, and soon read and spoke the language with extraordinary correctness and fluency. Latin was, of course, the staple of education in those days, no other tongue being allowed within the walls of the school-room.

There were in reality only two "Rs" for

the boys of the Cathedral school—reading and writing—arithmetic being a rare accomplishment, a fact which is not surprising, since up to the thirteenth century calculations had to be made in Roman numerals. Even in the fourteenth century the Arabic figures had not been adopted in the remoter parts of Italy, and teachers were few in consequence of the ill reputation of Arabian learning. The old-fashioned school-master of Feltre would have considered a lesson in the Arabic notation as an initiation into the Black Art. Music and singing gave a certain variety to the study of Latin, and were warmly taken up by Vittorino, though he did not permit them to interfere with his passionate devotion to his books.

Those books, however, were few, for printing was not yet invented, and manuscripts were scarce and expensive. This, indeed, was an advantage to the scholar, because, instead of dividing his attention among many books, he was obliged to concentrate it upon one, and thus became master of that one before proceeding to others. At home, too, Vittorino had the

advantage of cultivated surroundings, and it is probable that he derived from his father's lessons the beautiful handwriting for which he was remarkable in after years. The notary would not have neglected in his son an accomplishment which was of so much importance to himself in his profession.

The good priest of the parish took extreme interest in the lively and somewhat petulant child. Vittorino was not always easy to manage, for he had a most formidable will of his own, and was capable of tremendous outbursts of temper. Mean or unjust actions on the part of his schoolfellows always met with prompt vengeance, and, when a boy was bold enough to retaliate, a pitched battle was the result. Then came punishment, tears and repentance, and, when Vittorino had made his first confession, the grace of the sacrament enabled him to be a better boy and not to use his fists so freely in future.

By degrees the good confessor taught his little penitent the value of self-control. The child proved an apt pupil, so that he ob-

tained complete mastery over what would otherwise have been an ungovernable temper, and a great drawback to his beneficent influence over others.

The practice of weekly confession, adopted in his childhood with a view to the correction of his faults, was continued throughout life, and was always recommended by Vittorino to his pupils as an admirable means of rooting out defects of character and acquiring good habits. He possessed in a large measure the spirituality inherent in the Italian nature, and the truths of Faith had a strong hold upon him.

Those were the days when Italy had been stirred by the sanctity of St. Catherine of Siena, and when friars went from place to place exhorting men to the love and fear of God. Vittorino learnt to love our Blessed Lord and His Holy Mother, and to honour his Angel Guardian and Patron Saint. He was deeply touched by the thought of heaven, and dreaded above all things that terrible hell which Dante had recently depicted in such awful colours. Many a poor scholar who obtained a night's shelter from

Bruto de' Rambaldoni paid for the hospitality so charitably granted by reciting never-to-be-forgotten passages from the *Divine Comedy*.

However pious he might be at his prayers, in serving Mass, or singing in the Cathedral choir, Vittorino was, nevertheless, a real everyday boy, full of fun and frolic, eager to win at games, and ready to join in shout or race with his companions. Even at this early age he showed a marked talent for leadership. He would divide the other boys into battalions and engage in sham fights, taking by storm towns and castles built of the loose stones lying about in the fields.

A favourite game was a crusade against the Turks, in which he fancied himself a valiant Knight of St. John, and fought furiously against the infidels. He was always first to suggest the plan of campaign, and exercised great ingenuity in carrying it out. There was a small church on a height overlooking the city, built by Crusaders in Byzantine style, and thither Vittorino loved to go with the boys whom

he called his companions-in-arms. For them the little sanctuary was invested with a peculiar power of inspiration. The spirits of the noble builders, whose effigies lay cross-legged upon their tombs, seemed to haunt the place and beckon the youth of Feltre onward to glorious deeds in defence of the Christian name. They had no greater pleasure than to mount the hill and seek out an old man who had many a tale to tell of the holy wars in far-off Palestine. Then they would descend once more to their favourite place for play, and fight those battles over again, with Vittorino always as the captain of the Christian host. In this none could or would gainsay him, for he not only clung tenaciously to the honour, but he proved himself to be best fitted for the post. His influence was predominant, whether as their leader in war, or their judge in cases of dispute.

Thus the years passed until it was time for Vittorino to make his first communion. This was naturally a great event, not only for the boy himself, but also for the entire family. It was celebrated with fitting re-

joicings, and, in conjunction with his confirmation, formed a new starting-point in his life. Our Divine Lord showered upon him His choicest gifts, and the Holy Ghost gave to him an abundance of the spirit of wisdom and of understanding, of knowledge and of counsel, which grew with his growth and strengthened with his years. Like the Child Jesus at Nazareth, he "advanced in wisdom and age and grace with God and man." His piety and his ardour for study were only equalled by his untiring energy and activity in everything else that he undertook.

If Vittorino had any marked attraction at this early stage, it was, perhaps, for a soldier's life, with its adventures and hair-breadth escapes. There was plenty of fighting in Italy in the fourteenth century. The Crusades were over, and thus one field for the exercise of the martial aspirations of knight, and squire, and peasant was closed. All the warlike spirit that was in the race was pent up at home, and found its chief outlet in the quarrels of rival cities and principalities. Roving bands of con-

dottieri, or mercenary troops, filled the land, ready to serve any master who would pay well, and just as ready to desert to that master's greatest enemy, if the latter would pay better.

Many a time did little Rambaldoni stand with open mouth and dilated eyes at the city gate—the old Porta Imperiale—listening to the tales of terror brought in from the country by some wayfarer who had seen strange sights on his road. No village was secure; no farmhouses dotted the plain, for the only places of safety were the walled cities or rock-built fortresses. Those who cultivated the land worked in fear and trembling within reach of the walls, and every cloud of dust suggested to them some fierce band of horsemen from whom the only refuge was in prompt flight.

Not every fortress, indeed, was secure. Sieges were frequent, and in the event of the capture of a city a heavy ransom was exacted, while the most terrible tortures were inflicted on the wretched citizens to compel them to pay. Ruthless massacres took place when the disappointed enemy

found that there was nothing to be obtained from the inhabitants. On one of these occasions a flourishing town was levelled to the ground, and only five persons escaped to tell the tale of the assault. One city was sacked and robbed of every article of value; the houses were then burnt, and, as if in irony, the bare and dismantled fortifications were sold to the former inhabitants, who had to buy thus dearly the right to return to their own ground.

In spite, however, of the horrors of war and of the atrocious deeds of some of those engaged in it, there were heroes among the condottieri who were dear to the Italian heart. One of these, strange to say, was an Englishman. Often did Vittorino hear the name of Aguto—Giovanni Augud, as he was called in the dialect which thus disguised the English pronunciation of John Hawkwood's surname.

Sir John was growing old now, and though he had not lost the vigour of his youth, he was inclined to sell his services at a higher price, and was wavering between the great cities—Florence, Genoa and

Venice. Florence proved the highest bidder and made him her captain-general of war, in which position he remained till his death in 1394. So great a hero was this bold Englishman that the Italians held him almost in veneration, and the city of Florence testified her gratitude for his services by erecting a noble monument to his memory.

In listening to these tales of the prowess of Sir John Hawkwood and his band of steel-clad warriors, Vittorino made his first acquaintance with the name of the distant island where he was to be one day known and loved. He heard, too, how the great Catherine of Siena had honoured the Englishman with an autograph letter, exhorting him in her direct manner to quit the pay of Satan and enter that of Christ by joining a crusade against the Turks. If the princes of Italy had listened to her entreaties and to the repeated invitations of the Popes, the crusade might have been organised, and Hawkwood might have exercised his valour against the infidel. But both princes and condottieri were too busily engaged in fight-

ing at home to unite in turning their arms against the enemy of Christendom. The Turks made further encroachments as time went on, until Constantinople fell into their hands in the year 1453.

The lords of neighbouring cities were often in evil repute at Feltre. There was the House of Malatesta at Rimini, equally renowned for its wickedness and for its extraordinary talents. The Visconti of Milan vied in warlike deeds with the Carraras of Padua, upon whom Feltre depended, and the smaller House of the Gonzagas of Mantua did not think it unworthy to take service with the wealthy commercial state of Venetia. So great, in fact, was the power of Venice at this time that she not only ruled the Mediterranean, but encroached upon the territories lying to the north and west of her borders.

In the year 1388, when Vittorino was ten years old, Feltre came into the possession of Venetia, partly by barter and partly by treachery. Such topics would be spoken of in the city, sometimes in loud, angry tones, sometimes in low, excited

whispers, while the boys drew near to listen until the shades of evening fell. Then, at the sound of the Angelus bell, the children ran home to their mothers for their evening meal, and, after saying their night prayers, retired to rest.

In those happy, healthy slumbers of his childhood, dreams came to Vittorino in which he imagined himself a soldier in the ranks, fighting under his hero, the gallant Englishman, Aguto, or perhaps leading a company of his own to victory. Then the game of battle became for him a reality. Instead of his school-boy companions and their make-believe weapons, he was one of a party of knights on mettlesome chargers, with gleaming armour and silken surcoats, rushing to the fray.

The miseries and dreadful consequences of war did not affect a dreaming boy, who had not yet reflected on the gloomy side of life, and whose imagination was tinged, not with the crimson hue of blood, but with the rosy light of hope and cheerful fancy. It was only later that he realised how far from his vocation were his early

aspirations, and how much more admirable and heroic was a life devoted to the peaceful service of his fellow-men in the paths of learning and virtue.

During times like these, while Italy was torn by the fury of contending factions, poverty pressed hard upon the Rambaldoni family. It was no wonder that when no man was sure of his own property there should be but little need and less remuneration for the work of a notary.

Amid the privations consequent upon such circumstances, Vittorino grew up a small-sized and delicate lad, with little experience of worldly comfort and pleasures. But there was in him something of the poetic temperament which raised him above the sordid things of earth, though it never led him into idle dreaming. He loved solitude, and would willingly have entered the monastic state had God so ordained, though the life of a Knight of St. John would, perhaps, have attracted him more than that of a contemplative. Yet here again his love of books came in and drew him towards a scholastic career.

Young Vittorino at the Porta Imperiale. [p. 11.

As he grew older, his studious inclinations were fostered and strengthened by lonely visits to his favourite spots. About three miles from Feltre, at the foot of the hills, the river Piave flows through a beautiful valley. Here Vittorino loved to spend a holiday, with a fishing-rod, a Latin manuscript, and a crust of bread in case of need. The winding river, with its pools and shallows, was an excellent place for an expert angler, such as he soon became; and he used to return triumphantly in the evening, bearing to his mother a well-filled basket of various kinds of fish, very welcome to the poverty-stricken household.

The Piave is here not many miles from its source, and has not yet grown into the broad stream which flows into the Adriatic above Venice. But it was for this reason all the more beautiful and solitary. Having chosen a suitable position, Vittorino would divide his attention between his author, generally Virgil, and his rod; though he could not refrain from enjoying at the same time the beauty of the panorama spread

before him. He contemplated with delight the soft air glorious with sunshine, the deep blue of the sky, the clear and rippling water of the river, the mossy verdure of the rocks, and the distant hills rising tier upon tier into the snowy summits of the Alps. All these things were in absolute harmony with his nature, and when he considered the origin of that harmony he felt that he must refer it all to God. Thus his mind was raised from earthly up to heavenly things, and with this elevation came the conviction that he was made for God's service, and must be true to his divine vocation.

But what work was he called to do? God would surely point it out to him in His own good time, but for the present he must wait and trust. Meanwhile, he resolved to make a good use of his time, and endeavour to become fit for whatever task lay before him. Gradually the glamour of the battle-field faded from his sight; he no longer dreamt of Hawkwood and deeds of arms, but gave himself up to hard study. Soon he had made himself

master of all the books that Feltre contained, and he felt that he must go abroad and follow the bent of his intellect towards the acquisition of all possible learning in the arts and sciences.

A wave of enthusiasm for the ancient classics of Greece and Rome was passing over the land. Even in remote and quiet Feltre rumours had penetrated of what was doing in the larger cities. Dante had given the first impulse to the new learning, but he had chiefly succeeded in exciting a patriotic interest in the Italian tongue. Petrarch, his great successor as a poet, was a more eminently literary man, devoting himself to the study and imitation of the ancient Latin writers and to the Greek language, while at the same time he composed his own verses in his gentle mother-tongue. His fame had spread from Padua, where he spent many years of his later life, to all the northern portion of Italy. The impetus given by him and by his friend and disciple, Boccaccio, to the study of the classical authors has caused them to be regarded as the first promoters of the great

literary movement, known as the Renascence. Wandering scholars scattered the knowledge of their teaching throughout the country, and though both died shortly before the birth of Vittorino, their memory was still fresh in men's minds.

An ardent thirst for learning began to take possession of the younger generation, and in order to satisfy it they flocked to the universities, where alone the coveted knowledge could be obtained. It need not be said that Vittorino was smitten with the prevailing enthusiasm, and that he longed with all his soul to join the stream of youths who were so happy as to be able to turn their steps towards Bologna, Padua or Florence. But, alas! dire poverty reigned supreme in the Rambaldoni household, and there seemed little hope of satisfying the boy's craving for learning. It was more likely that he would be obliged to earn his living than that he should go to waste his time at a university, as many young men did in those days.

Meanwhile the Church herself was passing through some of the darkest hours of

her history. For seventy years the Popes had lived at Avignon, in France, instead of in Rome. Until the very year of Vittorino's birth none but French Popes had been elected, and it was only by the exertions of St. Catherine of Siena that Gregory XI could be induced to return to Rome. Even then a succession of anti-popes caused grave disorders to arise, and so great was the confusion that men were often in doubt as to which of the claimants had been properly elected.

Strange advantage was taken of this state of affairs to spread abroad rumours of the coming of Antichrist, and of the approaching end of the world. Some false prophets went so far as to indicate the exact dates of these events, and even to assert that the reigning Pope, or his opponent the Anti-pope, was Antichrist himself. These dark and mysterious reports had a most pernicious effect on the ignorant and credulous masses, while young people, however thoughtful and sensible, could scarcely escape from sharing in the general excitement.

It was not easy for Vittorino to guess that the stories flying from mouth to mouth were in reality political weapons made use of by the French to bring back the Popes to Avignon, and to renew the servitude of the Church to the temporal power.

The French view of the case was invariably made attractive. It was stated that the Italian Pope would be slain, and that a new Emperor and a new Pope, the expected "Pastor Angelicus," would restore peace and harmony to the world. Both these potentates were, of course, to be French, and would take care that France should get her due share of the good things to come.

Such were the topics of interest which attracted Vittorino's attention outside his books. The times were evil, it is true, but they were full of novelty and excitement, making life seem worth living for the sake of the unknown future.

One fortunate event had already happened when Feltre was annexed to the wealthy commercial state of Venetia, and began to share in the varied life and move-

ment resulting from direct communication with the East through the Adriatic Sea. The river Piave traced a road through the country, and soon gave direction to an interchange of commodities, which made work for the notary, Rambaldoni. Vittorino himself was employed from time to time as a trusty messenger between one merchant and another, and thus had an opportunity of exercise on horseback, which had hitherto been one of his great ambitions rendered hopeless by poverty.

In this way he was not only able to help his parents by earning money, but to add to his small knowledge of the world by these first attempts at travel. Sometimes he was sent south to Bassano, or Treviso, among the busy haunts of men; at other times his errand led him up the river to Belluno, a city picturesquely situated in the Alpine district and remarkable for its massive stone gateway, dating from ancient times, and its delicate, slender bell-tower or campanile, one of the most beautiful in Italy.

The ride to Belluno was delightful, for

it led towards the source of the Piave, which became more charming as it grew narrower, and in its winding course fell over rocks and stones, forming little cascades, and sprinkling its banks with the spray, which kept ferns and mosses always fresh and green. Overhead, too, there was protecting shade from the thick foliage of the trees, and as if to give further zest to the pleasure of the journey there was just a suspicion of danger from brigands or condottieri. For this reason Vittorino's employers always took care to provide him with a swift horse lest he should be attacked, and the boy learnt to keep his seat so well, that he was ever afterwards admired as a graceful rider.

Thus did Vittorino pass his youth, and thus were laid the foundations of his character, its mingled strength and sweetness, its capacity for endurance and perseverance, combined with a most tender and compassionate regard for his neighbour. The hardships and poverty of his surroundings taught him patience and humility; the simplicity of life at Feltre

preserved him thus far from many temptations, while his love for the beauty of nature raised his soul to God, and, by giving him a relish for prayer, kept him faithful to his religious duties. Already he had formed habits of assisting at daily mass, of weekly confession and more frequent communion; and the Office of Our Lady was a step towards his later practice of reciting the Canonical Hours, as if he had been in Holy Orders.

The connection with Venice led to such an improvement in the Rambaldoni family affairs that Bruto found it possible to equip his son for a residence at the University of Padua. Vittorino was eighteen years old, and though slight and small for his age, was well formed and athletic. His health was good, his mind acute, and his spirits buoyant. Though broken-hearted at leaving his happy home and his good parents, he felt that his future depended on his following out the bright ideal he had set before himself. Great was the grief of Bruto de' Rambaldoni and his pious wife at parting with their boy, but the farewells

were said with Christian fortitude. Vittorino set out on foot, carrying with him his small belongings, and trusting for the journey to the hospitality never refused to a poor scholar on the road.

CHAPTER II

UNIVERSITY LIFE AT PADUA

THE youth who thus set out to seek his fortune had a journey of some fifty miles before him. He left his native Alps behind, and descended in a south-westerly direction towards the valley of the river Po. The scenery through which he passed was magnificent, and would have stirred the heart of one less appreciative of the beauties of nature than was Vittorino. Huge crags like castellated citadels guarded the road, their tops sometimes the home of eagles, and sometimes the strong places of men. Mountain streams leaped and danced from rock to rock, sparkling in the sunlight, while green verdure and brilliant flowers added to the charms of this enchanted land.

But, however sensible Vittorino might be

of the outward glory of the visible world, and however engaged in drinking in its beauty, there was an inner world which could not be ignored. His soul was filled with conflicting emotions rising and falling like the ebb and flow of the sea. When he looked backward his heart became heavy as lead, and the first feelings of home-sickness pressed upon him. All that lay behind him was warm with affection and old associations; in front of him stretched out indefinitely a cold, unknown future, a life among strangers in a strange land. Yet this very thought was irradiated with hope when he reflected on his university course among the books and the learned men of a great intellectual centre. How he would work, and how he would pray, and what honours he would strive for and perhaps attain! The future, at eighteen, always looks bright, however dark the present may be, and Vittorino could not but feel the exhilaration produced by the sunshine, the balmy air, the song of the birds and the murmuring of the waters, when his mind's eye looked forward to happy days beyond the

ache and pain of this first separation from all that he loved.

At nightfall, somewhat weary and foot-sore, he stopped at a little stream near the gate of Montebelluna, and taking off his sandals, washed the dust from his feet in the sparkling water. Reinvigorated, he boldly entered the town, and was not long before he found a lodging for the night. In the morning he awoke refreshed, and after hearing Mass pressed on with the intention of reaching Campo San Pietro by evening. During the heat of the day he rested in a shady spot by the side of a bubbling spring of ice-cold water, which quenched his thirst while he ate his bread and took his noonday siesta. He was hospitably entertained in the little town, but he was eager to reach Padua, and, rising betimes, proceeded on his way regardless of the fatigue which now began to oppress him.

The sun was low in the heavens when he came in sight of the ancient city of Padua, strongly fortified, with flanking towers and massive gates. As it lay beneath him he

could perceive the seven great domes of the glorious church of St. Anthony, one of the wonders of Italy. The sight of this immortal tribute of the citizens to their sainted apostle brought home with new force to the young traveller the quest on which he had come thus far. He lifted his cap and raised his heart in prayer to the saint who, through humility, had buried his talents and eloquence in the kitchen of a Franciscan monastery, until God saw fit to publish them to the world. This very ground had been trodden by the wonderful preacher not more than a hundred years ago, as he went on his way urging men to love God and to devote their lives to His service. No better patron could be chosen by a student in Vittorino's circumstances than this saintly friar, nor did the youth neglect to recommend himself and his studies to the protection of St. Anthony, as with a feeling of awe he entered the city of Padua by its northern gate.

But he was doomed to serious disappointment. Instead of the magnificence he had dreamt of as inseparable from an important

university city, he found narrow, dirty streets, with dark alleys and gloomy recesses, uncleansed and uncared for, and differing widely from his own little mountain home at Feltre. His means were too small to permit him to choose a lodging to his taste. He was obliged, therefore, to put up with such a miserable attic as was within the limits of his purse, and even this was not easy to find.

The city was crowded with students of all nations, drawn thither by the fame of its professors. They were classified according to their nations, but though thus divided there were happily two bonds uniting them as one great family of Christians and Catholics. All had the same faith and all spoke Latin, the language of the Church. In those days, too, there was not that difference of pronunciation which prevents scholars of the present day from understanding each other's speech. Fortunately Vittorino found no difficulty here, for he was already proficient in the language.

The first disappointment was not by any means the last. Instead of finding at the

University a gathering of well-behaved and serious-minded scholars, he was horrified, and even terror-stricken, by what he saw. Drinking-parties were organised by students of the different nations, after which they would sally forth in company and spend the night brawling and fighting over their political differences. Rival professors vied with each other as to which should attract the greater number of disciples, and jealousy thus roused resulted in most unseemly conduct on the part of both masters and pupils. Further complications arose from hostility between "town and gown," scholars and citizens making use of deadly weapons in their onslaughts. Many of the students were mere children, boys not fifteen years of age, and their mischievous pranks caused disorder in the University itself.

It is not difficult to imagine the feelings of a poor lad, carefully brought up far from the din and turmoil of great cities, when he found himself in the midst of society such as this. Many were the tears he shed kneeling by his wretched pallet in his

lonely attic, and often did he wish himself back in his quiet home among his own dear Alps. He wondered whether it was possible that learning should be bought at such a price as this, and he seriously contemplated retiring from the world and consecrating himself to God in some religious order. However, after a long and bitter struggle he resigned himself to stay for the present in Padua.

The temptations of a life like this were very great, frequently causing the shipwreck of soul, body and mind, when a young stranger was not strong enough to resist them. The need of money was, as a rule, the first cause of these misfortunes. Borrowing led to debts, debts to theft, gambling and imprisonment, if not to crimes such as murder and sacrilege. Self-respect being lost, a course of dissipation often led to an early grave. How was Vittorino to escape so terrible a fate? It was now that his careful training and his pious practices stood him in good stead. He held firmly aloof from all dangerous company, and continued his weekly confession and

his usual devotions, adding austerities and much prayer.

It was not long before the grave young stranger was noticed by the better sort of the scholars frequenting the University, and by the clergy of St. Anthony's, his favourite place of refuge. By degrees he made friends worthy of himself, and as time went on his amiability and personal charm attached them to him and enlarged the circle of those who admired and loved him.

Among all the students then in Padua he was most attracted by Guarino of Verona, a young man remarkable for his distinguished talents and exemplary morals. The same thirst for knowledge animated both, with the difference that Guarino was an ardent lover of Greek, a language in which he was already proficient, somewhat to the detriment of Latin, in which Vittorino excelled. Men marvelled at one thing in the appearance of Guarino, which seemed incompatible with his youth. He was only in his twenty-fourth year, and yet his hair was as snowy white as that of an old man of eighty. It was once raven black,

and the change had taken place in one night, in consequence of his passion for Greek.

The catastrophe came about in the following manner, if we may credit contemporary writers. Guarino was in comparatively easy circumstances, an advantage which enabled him at an early age to satisfy his longing for knowledge by crossing over to Greece, there to study his favourite language at its fountain-head. In his enthusiasm he copied many manuscripts and bought others, so that, when the time came for returning to Italy, he was obliged to pack the books in several cases, which he took with him on board ship. Happy in the possession of these priceless treasures, he rejoiced at the thought of carrying them home to Verona, where they would be the envy and admiration of all his learned acquaintances. As he stood on deck he was alarmed by gathering clouds and a rising wind, which seemed to cause anxiety to the sailors. He knew that the north-east wind or "bora" is most dangerous in the Adriatic, and already he began to tremble more for his precious manuscripts than for his

still more precious life. His presentiment of evil was verified. As the storm rose and the ship was tossed upon the angry waves, the sailors had much ado to keep her from sinking. The captain, in despair, ordered that the entire cargo should be cast overboard, that by this extreme measure he might save the lives of passengers and crew. Guarino was wild with distress and terror. He threw himself upon his knees at the captain's feet, and implored him with tears to spare the fruit of his labours. His entreaties were as vain as his promises and threats. The ruthless sailors flung the chests into the sea, and it was with no small difficulty that their owner could be prevented from leaping after them.

When morning dawned and the tempest subsided, the unhappy scholar was found crouching in a corner almost insensible. His hair, which had been black on the previous day, had literally grown "white in a single night," so great had been the anguish of his mind at the loss of his treasures.

Fortunately Guarino had not lost his

memory or his talents. These he brought back with him to Italy, and when Vittorino made his acquaintance at Padua he had quite recovered from his grief, and was ready at the first opportunity to undertake a new journey to Greece in order to repair the defects in his library. From this example we may judge of the devotion of scholars to learning in the days when Vittorino and Guarino began what was to be a lifelong friendship.

A university education is expensive, and Vittorino soon found that, if he wished to continue his studies at Padua, he must adopt some expedient by which to obtain funds. In casting about with this object in view he discovered his true vocation—that of a teacher and instructor of youth—the vocation by which he was unconsciously to make for himself fame and reputation.

After a short time of residence in the city he perceived that there were many young boys attending the University who, though possessed of ample means and considerable ability, were kept back and discouraged by their ignorance of the elements of Latin

grammar. One or two of these he had generously helped without a thought of gain; but now, following the example of other poor scholars, he offered his services for a small fee. His excellent lessons quickly drew pupils, and it was not long before he was able to move to better lodgings and to buy some books. Of food and clothing he recked but little, nor was he too particular about comfort in his sleeping apartment, provided that he could secure cleanliness and quiet, commodities not easily found in a mediæval university city. Of the dangers and difficulties awaiting newly-arrived strangers he had had sufficient experience in his own person to render him kind and sympathetic towards others.

His attention once directed to the work at hand, he threw himself into it heart and soul. He became the providence of poor scholars, coming to their assistance not merely in evident and urgent cases, but even going out of his way to befriend them. The money that he received from his wealthy pupils was generously shared with

his needy friends, and the treasures of his mind were likewise at their disposal.

Even at Feltre Vittorino had shown a masterful will and the spirit of a born leader of men. At Padua he had greater scope for his talents, for outside lecture hours the youth of the University were left as sheep without a shepherd, liable to fall under any influence, whether good or bad.

By degrees Vittorino formed a group of students who were willing to live as he lived, and to look up to him as their guide. The eminent scholar, Conversino of Ravenna, who at that time filled the chair of Rhetoric at Padua, could not help remarking this unusual element in his audience. He entered into friendly relations with the young leader of these model disciples, and proved a good friend to him. Conversino was the greatest Latin scholar of his time, and it was a powerful stimulus and a source of much intellectual profit to Vittorino to be brought into close contact with so remarkable a man. From this acquaintance sprang a further advantage in the shape of a friendship with Conversino's

successor in the chair of Rhetoric, of which we shall have to speak later.

In a brawl between students and townsmen, it happened that a scholar, in whom Vittorino was interested, received so severe a wound that he was conveyed to the hospital. Vittorino went to see the invalid, and was assiduous in his visits and in every little necessary attention until the lad was able to return to his ordinary life. But the incident opened out a wider horizon to Vittorino, who now, for the first time, realised what a world of suffering is enclosed within the walls of a hospital, and how pleasing the practice of entering therein must be to Him who will one day say, "I was sick and you visited Me." From that time forward he made it his daily custom, wherever he might be, to give some time to the visitation of the sick poor in the hospitals.

Though these charitable undertakings added to Vittorino's labours, they did not prevent him from making amazing progress in his studies. It is, in fact, probable that by teaching others he confirmed and

strengthened the knowledge he already possessed. Success followed upon success, and without a pause he pressed forward to the degree of Master of Arts. This degree qualified him to take up the work of teaching as a profession, and with the certainty of a regular stipend. He was now proficient in Latin Grammar and Literature, in Rhetoric, Dialectic and Moral Philosophy, and was enabled to compete for the "laurea," or degree of Doctor of Arts, which he obtained without difficulty. But there was a gap in his mind which he was determined not to leave unfilled. Vittorino knew practically nothing of Mathematics.

Now at Padua there was only one competent teacher of this abstruse science. His name was Pelacane, and he had come thither from Parma to make his fortune if he could by selling his knowledge at a high rate. As yet Vittorino was not in a position to pay this man the exorbitant price he demanded, but he was incapable of being daunted by merely pecuniary difficulties. In order to gain access to the great mathematician he presented himself at his house

as a servant or "famulus," a position often taken up by a poor scholar anxious to pick up, as it were, "the crumbs from the rich man's table." With sweet humility he performed the office of a footman, grudging no humiliation and no work, however disagreeable, for the sake of the science he longed to learn.

It was all in vain. The inexorable Pelacane accepted the gratuitous service, but refused to yield up his treasure except for money. Vittorino begged and entreated as far as his self-respect would allow, but without effect. At the end of six months, therefore, he left the miserly professor, and, having bought a Euclid, set to work to teach himself. As if in reward of his self-sacrifice he became so efficient in this branch that his reputation as a mathematician spread throughout Italy, and is still commemorated by an inscription on a medal preserved in the British Museum. As for Pelacane, he regretted too late the loss of a brilliant pupil who would have done him honour; he became more and more avaricious and grasping, so that, finding his

classes deserted, he was obliged to quit Padua, with none to say a good word for him. Vittorino was but confirmed by this incident in his generous habit of giving without stint all that was asked of him, and even forestalling requests whenever it was in his power to do so.

Although now a distinguished Doctor of Arts, regarded as an authority on the most difficult questions, Vittorino was as simple as ever. He was entitled to wear the distinctive gown and ring betokening his position, but he preferred to remain unnoticed and unknown at a time when scholars were only too ready to flaunt their honours before the world. The difference between Vittorino and the other learned men of the day may be illustrated by contrasting him with one of the friends he made in Padua at this time.

Francesco Filelfo was, like Guarino, an enthusiastic student of Greek. But, unlike either Vittorino or Guarino, he was a prey to insatiable avarice. In this he resembled Pelacane; but besides this he was filled with an overweening self-esteem which led

him to consider himself as the genius of the age. Though ever eager to find favour with the rich and noble, he made up for his obsequiousness towards them by continually quarrelling with his equals—his inferiors, as he considered them to be.

However, as it generally takes two to make a quarrel, and as Vittorino was not only of a peaceable turn of mind, but never desirous of standing in the way of others, they remained tolerably good friends. At Padua, too, Filelfo was still young, and the faults of his character had not yet developed into the vices of his later years. Had he remained longer in the society of Vittorino he might have improved, but Filelfo's devotion to Greek led him first to Florence and then to Greece itself, where he resided for some years, with more profit to his scholarship than to his morals. We shall meet with Filelfo again in the course of our narrative.

In spite of Vittorino's "laurea" and other honours, his thirst for learning was not satisfied. With some idea, perhaps, of entering the ecclesiastical state, he turned

his attention to theology, and attended a severe course of Canon Law. His usual success followed him in these new studies; and, though he always remained a layman, there were few clerics who surpassed him in the sacred sciences.

His fame increased, and with it his means, so that he was able to open a house of his own, into which he received his pupils and prepared them for the University courses. The curriculum in this boarding-house was severe, and strictly carried out, for Vittorino was determined that the loose life of the Paduan students should not invade its precincts. The number of boys was limited to the accommodation, because the master knew that regularity of life is impossible where there is overcrowding. Other professors might admit to their houses many more boarders than there was room for, but though such a course was more lucrative it could not be accompanied by decency and comfort, and hence became demoralising. Vittorino held firmly to his purpose, for he was not the man to do evil for the sake of gain.

The hour of rising was fixed, but long before it struck the master was up and at his prayers. He called the boys himself, and on winter mornings might be seen with a candle in his hand, rousing one or other for some special work to be done before school hours. They all attended Mass at St. Anthony's, and Vittorino's favourite place for prayer was the side chapel where the Saint's relics repose in their magnificent shrine. All Padua was, then as now, full of devotion to the great St. Anthony, and so many were the wonders worked by his intercession that his fame went forth into distant lands, and is still extending even in our own twentieth century.

Taking him all in all, we cannot better describe Vittorino at this time than in the words used by Chaucer to portray the clerk of Oxenford, his contemporary. He was, like the clerk, not fat, and his coat was somewhat threadbare, for he—

> "would rather have at his bed's head
> Twenty books, clad in black or red,
> Of Aristotle and his philosophy,
> Than rich robes, or fiddle, or gay psaltery."

He had but little money stored up, for he spent it on the poor and on books and learning.

"Of study took he most care and heed,
Not a word spake he more than was need,
And that was said in form and reverence,
And short and quick, and full of high sentence.
Tending to moral virtue was his speech,
And gladly would he learn, and gladly teach."

So true it is that the real student and lover of learning is the same all the world over.

Vittorino spent twenty years in Padua. He reached that city in 1396, when he was eighteen years of age, a poor and lonely youth with the world before him. We have seen how he profited by every circumstance to improve his mind and train his soul to virtue, and how his very earnestness and disinterestedness helped him to ascend the ladder of learning. By the year 1415 he had attained the summit, and was secured in his high position by the love and admiration of his friends and pupils, and by a blameless reputation before the whole city.

He was not only a great and much-

esteemed scholar, but he was a man of saintly life, the refuge of the needy and the distressed, and the saviour of many a young soul cast unprotected upon the waters of vice which stagnated in the squalid lanes and alleys of the great city. Circumstances were about to draw Vittorino from his present surroundings, and to make a great change in his life—a change from which he would not fail to draw profit, as he had hitherto done from each event in his career.

CHAPTER III

THE SCHOOL IN VENICE

VITTORINO was now thirty-six years old, and he had never been beyond Padua. In consequence of this he was lacking in one of the most important accomplishments of a scholar of the period. There was no chair of Greek in the University, nor had any competent teacher of the language taken up his abode in the city. The enthusiastic, white-haired Guarino had been drawn away long ago from his friend by the still greater affection he had for Greek. His departure from Padua was brought about in the following manner.

Some years before the arrival of Vittorino in Padua there came to Italy an embassy from Greece, imploring help against the Turks, who were threatening Constantinople from the foothold they already pos-

sessed in Asia Minor. The danger was imminent, and was only kept off another fifty-seven years by the most strenuous exertions of the defenders of Christendom.

Embassies were constantly being sent to the various Catholic powers, and the Popes earnestly exhorted all Christians to help in repelling the invaders. But princes and merchants were so entirely occupied with ambitious projects and the pursuit of gain, that they turned a deaf ear to Chrysoloras, the eloquent spokesman of the present embassy. However, though they refused to listen to his request for men and money, they were charmed by the graces of his style. He had no sooner returned to Greece than he received many overtures from the Italian cities, each one vying with the other as to which should acquire possession of so distinguished a professor. Florence gained the day, and all Italy was in a state of excitement over the acquisition of the proud city, which now began to attract hundreds of students eager to learn from Chrysoloras. His lectures began in 1397, just a year after Vittorino reached Padua.

It was not long before Guarino became restless, and he finally decided to go south and follow a course of Greek at Florence. Filelfo accompanied him, but Vittorino had neither the means nor perhaps the inclination to wander away from the studies he was steadfastly pursuing. After a time, Chrysoloras returned to Greece, and with him went his faithful disciples, Guarino and Filelfo. They both became eminent Greek scholars, though without deriving any moral benefit from their travels and studies. Filelfo married Theodora, the niece of Chrysoloras, and returning with her to Italy, paraded her through various cities, inviting all scholars to admire and pay homage to his sweet "Chrysolorine," as he delighted to call her. Guarino was not so fortunate; he remained for the present unmarried, and after a while opened a school in Venice for the teaching of the usual subjects, but especially Greek.

It was then that Guarino began to experience his deficiency in Latin, which had suffered during the time he had so passionately devoted to Greek. He had never

ceased to correspond with his beloved Vittorino, and it was to him that he now looked for assistance in carrying on his school. There was just this one thing wanting to Vittorino—that he should add Greek to his other attainments. Guarino wrote, therefore, representing the facilities which the school in Venice would give for this study, as well as the advantages he would himself derive from Vittorino's presence there. The prospect was too delightful to be neglected; the arrangement was made between the two friends, and all minor obstacles and objections were overcome.

Great was the dismay at Padua when Vittorino's decision became known. His pupils gathered round him, and with tears and lamentations besought him not to abandon them. Many of them made up their minds to follow him to Venice, there to remain his disciples, and at the same time to devote themselves to Greek in his company.

The professors of the Faculty of Arts, of which he was so brilliant an ornament, were in despair at the thought of losing

him, for with him, they knew, would go much of the fame of the University. They joined their entreaties to those of his disciples. Guarino, on the other hand, wrote pressing letters from Venice, urging a prompt compliance with his invitation. Vittorino's soul was torn between the two opposing parties, for he was drawn to each by strong affection. At last the reasonableness of Guarino's view conquered, and the little company of students with their master, having completed their final preparations, set out on horseback, in very different guise from that in which the poor scholar had, twenty years before, travelled from Feltre to Padua.

It was not without deep regret that Vittorino left Padua, where he had lived so studious and so saintly a life. There was the glorious church of St. Anthony, where he had spent so many hours of fervent prayer. There was the hospital, where he had said affectionate farewells to the patients, who loved and reverenced him. There was the University, to which he owed so much of the culture of his mind. Finally,

there was Padua itself, the birthplace of Livy and the home of all the arts. All these he was leaving behind him, and plunging once more into an unknown future, where troubles and difficulties might be awaiting him.

On this occasion his reflections were neither so dark as to the present nor so bright as to the future, as were those of his former journey; for he had learnt to know the world, and if he realised more fully the falsity of its promises, he feared it less, now that he was conscious of his own strength. Humility is truth, and Vittorino had tested his powers, and found that they were, with the grace of God, firmly set in the right direction and strong to bear trials.

Notwithstanding these serious thoughts of the master, the little cavalcade was cheerful enough as it wound through the hilly country beyond the river Adige, and beguiled the tediousness of the road with song, and jest, and learned discussion, as the youths who composed it chose to be grave or gay.

The presence of their teacher was no

restraint upon his disciples, for Vittorino was no dry-as-dust professor. His heart was young with the perennial youth of innocence and virtue, and his sympathies were ever with the young. This freshness was one of his greatest attractions, endearing him to his pupils, and preventing him from coming into rivalry with the ambitious and turbulent scholars who were his contemporaries in age. The beautiful scenery, and the pleasant relations between the travellers, made the hours seem short, and, before many days were over, the party reached the lowlands of Venetia, and knew that the island throne of the queen of the Adriatic was not far distant.

In this year, 1415, Venice was at the height of her prosperity and splendour. The Turks had not yet deprived her of her right of way through the Mediterranean to India and the East. Constantinople was still Christian, and Rhodes was held firmly in the grasp of the valiant Knights of St. John. Venice herself was able to defend her trade when it was necessary. She was just now preparing an armed expedition to

chastise the Turks for breaking a truce made between the Doge and the Sultan. On May 29, 1416, a great victory was won by the Venetians at Gallipoli, and the infidels were once more taught to respect the Christians. Commerce was carried on all along the shores of the Mediterranean, and even as far as the British Isles, so that Venice had no rival to equal her in the number of her ships or in the wealth which they brought into her port.

We can imagine the warm welcome given by Guarino to his dear old friend, and to the pupils he had brought with him. It was a double acquisition for the school. The most eminent teacher of Latin and Mathematics in Italy would have been an ornament to any educational establishment, and the Venetians were not slow to give tokens of their appreciation by sending their boys to learn from him. Besides this, there was the little band of faithful disciples brought by Vittorino, and their good behaviour and loyalty to their master won for him golden opinions from all sorts and conditions of men. A house was taken for their accom-

modation, and regulated according to the invariable rules laid down for such establishments by the wisdom and experience of Vittorino. Guarino shared his opinions with regard to discipline, so that the school in Venice was a model of perfect arrangement, and secured the most satisfactory results.

The two masters were, perhaps, the most accomplished and scholarly teachers of the age. His sojourn in Greece had given to Guarino an indescribable grace and distinction of manner, while his friend Vittorino, though more simple and less impressive in his bearing, won admiration and affection by the charm of his cheerful, happy disposition, and the innate dignity proceeding from his lofty ideals and force of character.

Daily mass, frequent confession and communion, with the recitation of the divine office, continued to be the rule of Vittorino's conduct. He had ample opportunities for his devotions in the splendid basilica of St. Mark, and the city hospital once more supplied him with the means for exercising his charity. Poor scholars were

still the objects of his predilection. He brought them into his house, and, supplying them with necessaries, set them on the same footing as the sons of wealthy merchants who crowded to the school. At the same time he applied himself to the study of Greek, in which Guarino gave him lessons, in return for the Latin he was so well able to impart. But Vittorino was probably beyond the age for learning a language with facility, and, though he obtained a solid working knowledge of Greek, he never became as distinguished in this as in his other accomplishments.

Besides the studies pursued in Guarino's school, there were many things to be seen and learnt in Venice. Everything was new to Vittorino and his Paduan pupils. There was, in the first place, an extreme contrast between dingy Padua and the gorgeous city, which was at that time the mart of the whole known world. St. Mark's surpassed St. Anthony's, not only in antiquity, but in its marbles, its sculpture, its architecture, and in the wealth of its treasures. Instead of the inland towns to which they

had been accustomed, the strangers found themselves in a sea-built city of the waters. Streets there were indeed, but they were not comparable to the water-ways over which the gaily-coloured gondolas skimmed to and fro. It may be remarked that it was only in the sixteenth century that these bright hues were exchanged for mournful black.

The Rialto, or Exchange, was the meeting-place of merchants and adventurers from all parts of the world. Opulent citizens, like Bassanio, there encountered unfortunate ship-owners like Antonio, pursued by greedy money-lenders not inferior to Shylock in avarice. Dark faces were there too—men hailing from foreign parts, with just such tales to tell as those with which Othello the Moor fascinated the gentle Desdemona. Magnificent marble palaces, many-coloured, and superbly decorated, rose gloriously from the waters, and within their walls was many an heiress, like queenly Portia, whose hand was sought by princes from afar.

A world such as Shakespeare has de-

picted for us was living and moving round the quiet school where Guarino and Vittorino taught their pupils with unstinted labour. And there came up to them from the sea, in ships, treasures such as they valued most, in the shape of precious manuscripts from Greece, which was within easy reach of Venice. It was at this period that Vittorino laid the small foundations of the rich library for which he was afterwards famous.

Fortunately for him, his success as a teacher brought him large remuneration, so that he was able to meet the expenses incurred in collecting books. The time in Venice was spent profitably, but with little outward eventfulness, until an outbreak of plague scattered the scholars and broke up the school.

The two friends once more separated, for Guarino had made up his mind to return to Verona, where his presence was much desired. He married, and settled down as a school-master, entering with patriotic zeal into the social and political life of his native city. His scholarship and distinction of

manner caused him to be chosen on important occasions to deliver addresses, or to act as the spokesman of embassies, and there are records of his services preserved in the archives of Verona. Vittorino, after hesitating for a while as to his next step, returned to Padua in 1420, having attained the end for which he had gone to Venice—a thorough knowledge of the Greek language. He was received with open arms in the University, and at once took up his own subjects, Latin and Mathematics.

It will be remembered that when Vittorino first went to Padua, the chair of Rhetoric was held by Conversino of Ravenna, who had been the disciple of Petrarch, and who was eminently qualified for his post. But it was to Conversino's successor, Barzizza, that Vittorino owed his real training, and the exquisite polish of his Latinity. In Barzizza's school Vittorino lived with Filelfo and other scholars, among whom he had no more congenial companion than Paolo Vergerio. The latter shared all his tastes both for study and for piety, and became renowned for a treatise on educa-

tion, in which he laid down the theories afterwards put into practice by Vittorino. Under Barzizza they made rapid progress, for it was he who first established a sound basis for the teaching of Latin by adopting the writings of Cicero as a model, not to be carefully imitated, but rather to be assimilated in such a manner as to secure a living reproduction of Cicero's style. When Vittorino returned to Padua Vergerio and Filelfo were both gone, but Barzizza still held his position, and welcomed his former pupil most cordially.

Two years had scarcely passed when Barzizza resigned the chair of Rhetoric, and all eyes were turned upon Vittorino as the fittest successor to the great scholar. He alone hesitated. He was now over forty years of age, and was still free to enter the religious or the sacerdotal state if he chose. Though not positively drawn to either, he preferred in any case the life he was leading as private tutor in a boarding-house to the career of a public professor, however honourable or lucrative. Still, it was difficult to give a reason for resisting

the pressing solicitations of those who wished to see him where he most deserved to be, in the place of honour of his own University. After much prayer and consideration he accepted the position, but he resolved to keep on his boarding-house for the sake of the pupils whom he already had under his care. Thus he was still able to devote himself to the work he loved best—the formation of individual character, and the direction of young souls in the paths of sanctity and science.

As professor in the chair of Rhetoric his office was to lecture to large bodies of students and scholars of all ages, with whom he could have no private communication on account of their numbers. He was therefore debarred from that personal contact by which alone he could hope to gain any lasting influence over them. It was only when treating of Philosophy, which was included in Rhetoric, that he had any opportunity of inculcating the maxims of the gospel, and such casual counsels were insufficient to stem the tide of vice which surged around him. Nevertheless, he was

extremely popular, and worked wonders by his admirable example, no less than by precept.

His fame was so great that the numbers of students attending the University increased every day, so that the city could not suffice for their lodging—there being nothing in the liberal arts which he had not mastered; and learned men from all parts resorted to him in their difficulties. It mattered not whether the question in dispute were in Latin or Greek, in Mathematics, Philosophy, or Canon Law, Vittorino was always looked upon as the most competent judge. His position in the chair of Rhetoric at Padua placed him in the front rank of men of culture, and he was well able to hold the place he had attained.

Meanwhile, abuses increased with the increasing number of students. It was in vain that Vittorino exerted himself to preserve even those more closely connected with him from the contagion of bad example. He grew more disgusted and disheartened from day to day, and longed to return to his life as a private tutor, that he

Vittorino with his pupils on the way to Venice. [p. 54

might be free from the responsibility of his present position. Drunkenness and revelry were the order of the day, and scandalous scenes occurred even while the professors were in the chair, the lectures being interrupted by brawls and profane language. At length, when Vittorino had been for a year in the midst of so uncongenial a life, there happened a breach of discipline so outrageous that he determined to resign his post and leave Padua for ever. His decision was characteristically prompt and irrevocable. The entreaties and promises of his friends and faithful disciples were of no avail; he fled like Lot from the burning city, and never again looked back upon his Alma Mater.

Once more Vittorino took the road to Venice. There was an ample field in that city for a teacher of his ability, and his former residence there was remembered by wealthy merchants who had sons to be educated. Every facility was afforded him for the opening of a school on the same lines as the one in which he had taught with Guarino.

He was happy to escape from his recent trials in Padua, and overjoyed to find himself once more in close touch with pupils of his own choice. His reputation was so well established that he could afford to dismiss any boys of whose conduct he did not approve. Those who really appreciated his school found in this an incentive securing their good behaviour, and gradually bringing them into the good habits fostered by strict discipline.

New strength and energy seemed to come to the master in his fortunate surroundings. He was now far removed from want, and was able to indulge his love for books by spending on them what remained when all his duties of charity were fulfilled. Charity with Vittorino always came first, books and learning second. Both were now amply within his reach, and he was supremely happy. All Venice loved and esteemed him, and came to him for counsel. His correspondence with learned men was extensive, and, though it added to his labours, was a source of intense pleasure.

Among those who wrote to him none was

more constant than Guarino, now master of a flourishing school in Verona and happy in a quiet home of his own. Besides his scholarly pursuits he had his domestic circle to write about, and was never weary of describing the quaint ways and clever sayings of his little son Gregorio.

If Guarino was lacking in the selfless devotedness to others, so characteristic of Vittorino, he was, nevertheless, exemplary in all his relationships, proving a good husband and a careful father, and acquitting himself conscientiously of all the obligations of his state of life. When friends of Vittorino quoted Guarino as a model for imitation, in their anxiety that the former should settle down in a home of his own, Vittorino would say with a smile and an affectionate gesture, indicating his pupils, "This is my home; these are my children." And truly he was like a beloved father in their midst.

Yet his stay in this happy school at Venice was to be short-lived, for the real work of his life remained to be done. It happened that John Francis Gonzaga,

Prince of Mantua, was seeking for a tutor for his children, and had pitched upon Guarino as the most distinguished scholar and the most trustworthy teacher within his reach. Guarino was not willing to leave his home in Verona, where he was not only happy, but deeply engaged in business of various kinds. He intimated to the Prince that, though he could not accept the post himself, he could recommend a friend, who would be even more suitable as a tutor. A Venetian merchant undertook the negotiation, and with such success that Vittorino consented to give up his school and remove to Mantua.

These frequent changes of domicile may give an impression of fickleness in the character of Vittorino, but it must be remembered that all the scholars of the period went from place to place, in order to acquire new knowledge, and to give their services where they were required. Vittorino was no exception to the rule at this period of his life, but two things may be said in his favour which could not truthfully be alleged of most of his contemporaries.

In the first place, he never changed his abode for the sake of worldly advantages or for the love of gain. In the second, his unbroken residence in Padua, when all the learned world was rushing to Chrysoloras in Florence, proved that he could be steadfast in the course marked out for him by duty. And it may be added that he had now, at forty-four years of age, come to the end of his wanderings, for he was about to enter upon the great work of his life, for which the preceding portion had been but a long and thorough preparation. It was at Mantua that he was henceforth to live, and, when his labours were happily completed, to die.

CHAPTER IV

THE PRINCELY HOUSE OF GONZAGA

A NUMBER of learned and saintly cardinals and bishops have rendered the family of Gonzaga illustrious in the annals of the Church. Nevertheless, its most glorious ornament is the young saint who entered the Society of Jesus in the year 1585, and who is honoured all the world over as the patron of Catholic youth.

The Gonzagas came of a fierce condottiere race, remarkable indeed for lively faith, but not greatly given to the practice of Christian charity. They acquired wealth and name and fame by their success in war, as well as by their shrewd adherence to the winning side in political struggles. The city of Mantua, with the surrounding territory, was their possession in the early fourteenth century, and, in the

year 1328, the magnificent palace still existing was completed. In this palace the Gonzagas held a court of almost regal splendour.

Mantua, like Venice, is an island city. The river Mincio, flowing southward from Lake Garda, spreads out at this point and forms two islands of high ground on which the fortress and the city proper are built. The fortifications are even at the present day the strongest in Italy, nor were they inferior in times when catapults and battering-rams had to do the work of cannon-balls.

The ground on which the city is built, rising from the midst of swampy lagoons, and marshes covered with reeds and bulrushes, is fertile and well wooded, and presents a pleasing picture from the plain below. From five great gates in the white walls five roads lead in different directions. The oldest of these leads northwards, turning later in an easterly curve towards Venetia. The approach to Mantua by this route is the most picturesque, and gives the most complete view of the city.

Along this road, in the early autumn of 1423, there advanced one day a little band of horsemen. They were young and merry, and had apparently suffered little in their long journey from Venice. Among them rode one, older and more grave in aspect, in plain black gown and cloak and academic hood, a dress not unlike that to which we are accustomed from pictures of Dante and Petrarch. Though he seemed the master and teacher of these youths, no outward token, not even the doctor's ring, betrayed the fact that here was one of the most learned men, one of the greatest humanistic scholars of the day, the noble and withal the truly humble Vittorino de' Rambaldoni of Feltre.

As was usual in his journeys, a number of his disciples were accompanying him to Mantua, where, if all could be well arranged, he would stay as tutor to the Gonzaga family. Vittorino was under no obligations to the lord of Mantua, and, if he might not have his own way with his pupils, he could shake the dust of the city from his feet and carry the treasures of his

learning elsewhere, for it was through no lack of other invitations that he was accepting this position. His formal statement of his conditions contained the clause that nothing unworthy should be required of him, and that his employer's life should be such as to command respect.

Mantua came further into view, towering above the road, its strong walls and lofty towers glittering in the sunlight, while at its feet the Mincio formed pools and islands of surpassing beauty. It seemed an ideal spot for the formation of a school, and as he looked upon it, Vittorino thought of Virgil, the great glory, not merely of his birthplace, Mantua, but of the Latin race. He shared the reverence of the scholars of the Middle Ages for the great poet, who, though a pagan, has left verse not unworthy of a Christian, and whose pen, moreover, never demeaned itself by writing anything unworthy of a man of letters. As Vittorino reflected upon these things he could not help uttering a prayer that so noble a soul might, by the mercy of God, one day rejoice in the beatific vision.

Dante had immortalised Virgil by taking him as his guide into the hell of his fancy, but a monk of an earlier age could not think but that he was in God's own heaven. As he begged that it might be so, he heard a sweet voice saying, "Pray for me, pray for me, and what thou so much desirest shall come to pass." Recalling this tradition, Vittorino raised his heart and prayed to God that the bard of Mantua might sing His praises for all eternity in heaven. Then turning to his disciples and interrupting their light discourse, he spoke to them of these graver subjects, and the party entered the city silent and thoughtful.

A little later in the day Vittorino waited upon John Francis Gonzaga in his princely palace. The condottiere general, born in 1390, was now in the flower of his age, little more than thirty. His dark and somewhat fierce aspect was tempered by the respect he felt for the guest he was receiving. In him there was a curious mixture of soldierly bearing, barbaric richness of dress, and a sort of superficial culture, indicating the transition through which his

House was passing, from the life of free-booters to that of sovereign princes of a future dukedom. In spite of his real benevolence, it was evident that at any moment the old savage nature might flame forth through the new and elegant gilding overlaying it. Vittorino, with his deep knowledge of men, quickly saw that a firm attitude would be necessary if he wished to do the good for which alone he had come to Mantua.

Seated together, the Prince and the scholar discussed the situation. Vittorino expressed his views clearly and plainly. It would be impossible, he said, to form a school in the midst of a court such as that of Mantua, where luxury and dissipation seemed to reign supreme. The children must be given over to him entirely, and he must be provided with the means of withdrawing them from the scenes of turbulence and pleasure which kept them in a continual state of excitement. The Prince agreed to this, for he was a man of sense and could be guided by reason. He was particularly struck by the manner in which Vittorino

inquired into details of the children's ages, characters and requirements, while he heard not a word of financial arrangements, so much to the fore in the negotiations of ordinary men of learning. He was altogether charmed by the sweetness and earnestness, combined with absolute straightforwardness and simplicity, of the new tutor, and he made up his mind on the spot that, come what might, he would not give up a man who had already captivated him as much by his honesty and disinterestedness as by his renown for scholarship. A generous monthly stipend was fixed, and Gonzaga added to this the privilege of drawing from the treasury all necessary sums as they were required. He concluded the interview by referring Vittorino to the Lady Paola, his wife, for further instructions, as he was off to Venetia, where his services were required.

A bustle of preparations was going on in the courtyards of the palace. John Francis Gonzaga was a gallant soldier, always ready to take up arms in the cause of others, provided he could secure a hand-

some share of booty. Not long ago he had so well defended Bologna for Pope John XXIII as to be rewarded with the title of General of the Army of the Church. Venice now called upon him to fight her battles with Milan, for she had sufficient occupation for her military and naval strength in guarding her commerce on sea, and was willing to forego the spoils, provided that the Milanese were kept in check. The present expedition would take some time, and meanwhile the Prince gave full consent to all the arrangements to be made between his wife and Vittorino during his absence.

Paolo, Princess of Mantua, was at this time in her thirtieth year. She belonged to the family of Malatesta, notorious in Italy for its evil deeds, and at the same time notable for the extraordinary good qualities of some of its members. The Lady Paola seems to have inherited a large share of all that was noble and excellent in the Malatestas, though her education had consisted mainly in the superficial polish of accomplishments.

As she entered the room, in all her beauty and stateliness, Vittorino was much impressed, for he had hitherto been little accustomed to the society of great ladies, but her charming kindness and affability soon set him completely at his ease. She was much better able than her husband to enter into the new tutor's ideas, for at Rimini she had come into contact with scholars, and had learnt to love learning for its own sake.

They talked matters over quietly, and mutually agreed that great alterations would be necessary if solid education were to be attempted. It would be well, too, that the changes should be brought about so gradually that the young people should not take fright at the severity of the discipline. There was another palace at a little distance, and if Vittorino would come and see it the Princess would be happy to accompany him thither. The expedition was arranged for the next day, after the departure of the troops.

Meanwhile Vittorino set himself to work at the study of his new environment. He

could not refrain from smiling to himself as he watched the different impressions made by his appearance upon the young nobles and courtiers who were in attendance upon the Gonzagas and their children. He was also somewhat shocked at the free-and-easy manners of his future pupils, for, according to custom, all these children were to belong to the school of the palace.

Luxury and self-indulgence met his gaze on every side. All the comforts that money could buy were lavished on the young princes, and their attendants enjoyed the same pleasures. Costly carpets covered the floors, priceless tapestries hung upon the walls, soft couches and easy-chairs were scattered about, inviting idleness and repose. Servants in gorgeous livery waited for orders, which generally concerned food and drink, or useless amusement. The Lady Paolo herself, in jewelled robes of rich brocade, moved amid all this splendour, apparently without a thought of its unsuitability for her children.

Provided they did nothing incompatible with their rank and dignity, she had hither-

to persuaded herself that all was well; not because she was indifferent to their morals, but because she had herself never known a life other than this. Her palace was indeed a great improvement on that of Rimini, where she was born and brought up, and it might be considered a model of propriety and good conduct when compared with the houses of other noble families of the period. Pomp and show and idleness appeared to her inseparable from rank and affluence, and it was evident to Vittorino that he must educate the mother before he could hope to succeed with the children.

As he passed through the stately rooms, his keen eye took in all these abuses, and a merry twinkle might have been noticed in it from time to time, had there been any-one present sufficiently observant. How he would change all this, when once he had made up his mind as to the method he should pursue!

In one apartment he found young Louis Gonzaga, the eldest son, and heir to the principality, lounging lazily upon a couch of crimson velvet. The boy was not much

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Vittorino's first meeting with the heir of the Gonzagas. [p. 80

more than ten years old, yet he was already the centre of a little court of flatterers who complied with his every whim. They knew well that in the event of any accident to John Francis it was in their interest to cultivate the favour of Louis; for in those days the risks of war were great, especially to a bold soldier like the General. In any case it was agreeable to bask in the young Prince's smiles, and they did not spare their adulation.

Vittorino's entrance was greeted by scornful looks and subdued laughter. He understood, but did not allow any sign of comprehension to appear upon his grave, austere countenance. Approaching the couch, he contemplated the boy for a moment, and with a pleasant smile asked him a few questions. Louis scarcely took the trouble to answer, and indeed his mouth was too full of sweetmeats to permit him to do so. He turned his half-closed eyes upon his tutor, and then relapsed into his usual occupation of eating. Vittorino passed on, and found a group of younger boys engaged in an angry altercation, the

subject of which seemed to be cheating at a game which they had been playing. One miserable-looking little fellow was rating the others, who appeared to be defending themselves. There might, thought Vittorino, be more hope for such children as these than for the spoilt heir of the Gonzagas. With his knowledge of boy-nature he was not long in finding out all about them and their quarrel. The thin, half-starved-looking leader of the band was no less a person than Carlo Gonzaga, who was thus early showing that he had inherited the fighting spirit of his ancestors. Vittorino made another mental note, and retraced his steps through the suite of apartments occupied by the children. Louis had left off eating for the moment, and, with the assistance of a page, was rising to his feet. As he slowly passed across the room, Vittorino saw that he was so fat that his breadth nearly equalled his height. Of all things in a pupil Vittorino detested most that superfluous flesh which is the result of over-indulgence in eating, and drinking, and sleeping, with the lack

of hard work and exercise. Should he ever be able to make anything of this boy? With God's help he would, and it will be seen that his success with Louis was nothing short of miraculous.

Next day at an early hour the Princess sent for Vittorino. He found her with her daughter Margherita, a girl of about thirteen years of age, very beautiful and modest, and very like her mother. Margherita was presented as one of the future pupils of the school, and replied to the tutor's questions that she had already made some progress in Latin and wished to learn Greek. Her bright, intelligent manner pleased Vittorino, and gave him hopes of better things than he had been led to expect from his first acquaintance with her brothers. All three crossed a bridge over one of the branches of the Mincio, and, walking up a shady avenue of fine old trees, they soon came in sight of the "Pleasure House" of the Gonzaga family.

It stood on high ground overlooking the river, and presented an imposing appearance, with its marble frontage and noble

entrance. Ascending a flight of steps and entering the spacious hall, the visitors found themselves in the midst of frescoed walls and curtained windows, beautifully carved woodwork and brilliant colouring. But it was the lightness and airiness of the place that charmed Vittorino. Lofty rooms opened out from wide corridors, and a magnificent staircase led to the upper floors. Coolness, and air, and light were everywhere, making this "Pleasure House" an ideal building wherein to keep school. Absolute quiet reigned, for the summer was over and the family and guests had returned to the city, leaving only the servants, who took care of the house and kept it in order for the use of occasional visitors.

Vittorino was still more delighted with the view from the back of the building. Broad meadows sloped down gently to the river's edge, forming just such a recreation ground as the tutor might have fancied in his dreams. These fields, the lady told him, were at his disposal, as well as the house. He stood contemplating the scene, and thinking what he could make of so

admirable a site if he only had his way. But what if he were impeded, what if his employers did not care to follow out his lofty ideals? Paolo, as if guessing his thoughts, fully reassured him. Her husband had allowed her complete liberty to make arrangements, and she promised Vittorino that he should never be interfered with in his plans. She knew that John Francis would never impose conditions contrary to the tutor's inclinations, lest he should lose so great an ornament of his court.

It was, in reality, Vittorino who was conferring a favour upon his employer by consenting to take charge of the Gonzaga children. Following the example of Florence, it had become fashionable among the Italian princes to cultivate arts and letters in their palaces and cities. Not only men of learning, but artists, architects, and sculptors were in great demand, and could name their own terms. The days were coming when Michael Angelo, for instance, could refuse to work for the Pope himself, and when Julius II would say to him,

after having followed him to his native city, "Since you would not come to us, we have been obliged to come to you."

Men like Filelfo could do grievous injury by satire and other literary weapons to those who failed to appreciate them. Filelfo once threatened the Pope to become a Turk and sell his services to the Sultan if he did not obtain the money he demanded. Of course Vittorino was far removed from any pretensions of this kind, but the Gonzagas were none the less anxious to satisfy his wishes that he might stay and grace their court. His requests were all on the side of virtue and learning, and when once he was thoroughly known he could not but be fully appreciated.

A day or two after this first visit to the "Pleasure House" the master took up his abode within its walls and received his pupils. They were in considerable number, and, with those he had brought from Venice, formed quite a large school, not less than fifty altogether. But some weeding was necessary, and Vittorino did not intend to leave it undone. He had decided

to remain at first a passive spectator, that he might the more readily discover the true dispositions of those who were offered to him as pupils. It was to be a boarding-school, and no unsuitable scholars, however noble and wealthy, should remain in it.

The master's quiet vigilance was taken for stupidity by a certain number of youths, and they prepared to settle matters for themselves. They did not remark that Vittorino's practised glance rested on one after another without betraying his sentiments. With their ordinary want of consideration and respect for their superiors they gave way to all their faults and failings as usual. Some of these faults were only the defects or excesses of noble natures still unspoilt, and these the master overlooked and seemed to ignore. But some of the children had been incurably injured in their moral character. After careful investigation they were dismissed, and their parents were recommended to place them elsewhere. There was much murmuring among the persons whose children were sent home, but Vittorino paid no attention

to it, because he knew the importance of laying an absolutely safe foundation for his work.

With the Gonzaga children, therefore, his own select class, and the others whom he chose to keep, the school began. The pupils were, for the greater part, young, because Vittorino preferred to make his own beginning, but among the boys he had brought from Venice were some older ones upon whom he could depend, having trained them himself in his various schools from their earliest years. One or two of his poor scholars became assistants in the work of teaching.

He was quite as particular with regard to the matron and the servants of the house as he was in the choice of his pupils. The Princess did her best to procure proper persons, with some success, though several were dismissed after a short trial, and others found to take their places. It must be admitted that Vittorino was hard to please, but he had learnt by experience in his other schools the great importance of good qualities in those who come into contact

with young minds. Some of his later letters to the Lady Paolo may still be seen, and in one of them he says of a matron with whom he is dissatisfied, "I can endure her no longer, nor would I, even if I could."

A great change was soon perceptible in the "Pleasure House." Even its name disappeared, and a more appropriate one took its place. It had formerly been a "Pleasure House" where idle hours were spent in profitless amusements; it now became a "Pleasant House," or, as we shall call it, a "Joyous House," devoted to study, prayer and play. It was still a house of enjoyment, for no master was ever more genial and cheerful than Vittorino, whose heart was always young, always innocent and always gay. But he would have no idlers or curious visitors to distract the attention of his children from their work; and to secure seclusion he ordered that the grounds and meadows should be enclosed, and no communications were permitted with outsiders. Within the house the rich carpets and luxurious lounges were

removed, that furniture of a more scholastic kind might be introduced. The frescoes on the walls were painted over with suitable pictures, representing the children of history, both sacred and profane, and other children at prayer, or study, or play.

Vittorino's entrance into any class-room was soon greeted by the radiant smiles of his little people, and his arrival in the playing-fields was the signal for a general rush to tell him of the latest successes or accidents in the games. He was then once more a child, such as he had been at Feltre, but with how great a gain to mind and soul! His childlikè innocence had been preserved, and was now enriched with the wisdom, knowledge and experience of his years. Happy the man who has lost nothing and superadded much to his treasures!

CHAPTER V

THE JOYOUS HOUSE OF MANTUA

ONE of his biographers tells us that Vittorino belonged to that class of men who, having discovered the work for which they are specially fitted by character and education, concentrate their whole being upon it and look for nothing else. Since the days at Padua, when poverty had thrown him into the life of a teacher, his vocation had grown upon him, and he had gone on gradually widening his sphere of work and influence.

The miserable failure of his attempt at being a public lecturer had convinced him that his instinct was correct in drawing him towards private tuition. In the select school at Mantua he had every opportunity for the study of the individual characters of his pupils, and for exerting that masterful will over the destinies of others which seemed to force them, gently but firmly,

into the right path, and to keep them there whether they would or no. This strong direction given to a child in his earliest years had so remarkable an effect that it is not known that any one who had once experienced it ever deviated from the straight path in which his childish feet were placed by the great master. Only one of his pupils, Valla, went astray into the pagan world of the Renascence, and this one came to Vittorino when his character was already vitiated.

Young Louis Gonzaga was almost a hopeless case, and, had he not belonged to the family to which Vittorino had bound himself, would have been at once dismissed. Often did the master's eyes rest on the fat, greedy boy, as he lazily munched his sweetmeats and selfishly kept them all to himself. There must be an end to this, and to several other bad habits, if the heir of the Gonzagas was ever to become worthy of his rank and title. A few days more of watching and waiting, and Vittorino began the course of treatment he had decided upon. It was severe, but tempered by the

master's never-failing kindness and thoughtfulness for his pupils. Louis was, after all, only a child, and there was hope of gradually breaking off his bad habits. The first restriction was upon eating other than at meal times, and, in order that it might press less heavily, meals were frequent and copious. Gradually they became fewer, and the fare was varied, so that its increasing simplicity was scarcely noticed by the boy, who was never reproached with his faults, but only taught quietly to do better.

When Louis had learnt some restraint in the quantity and quality of his food, he was gently led into a more becoming manner of eating. The all-absorbing occupation was diverted into another channel by pleasant talk and one or two of the master's good stories, or by the introduction of some interesting performance, such as music or singing, into the dining-room. When the child's attention had been caught, Vittorino would make a sign to a servant to remove his plate, and by degrees Louis became accustomed to the loss.

Plenty of exercise and fresh air took the

place of idle lounging, and gradually the young Prince, who had previously scarcely known how to move his limbs, began to exert himself and to take pleasure in activity. It was a work of patience and ingenuity, but Vittorino knew it was well worth the trouble. Though he never succeeded in completely eradicating the boy's defects, he made a man of him, with the result that the Marquis Louis of Gonzaga is known to history as one of the best rulers of Mantua.

Carlo's case was more hopeful from the beginning. He was quite different in appearance and disposition from his elder brother. Tall for his age and disproportionately thin, he was awkward in gait and action. His quarrelsome nature caused him to be disliked, and, though he had ability, he could not be kept at his books. These were materials in which Vittorino saw more chance of success than in the indolence and selfishness of Louis. Besides this, Carlo was not yet eight years old, and was susceptible to good management, especially as he was of a generous and noble disposition.

His physical defects were remedied by careful attention to his diet, which, though simple, was made nourishing and abundant. He also was encouraged to take much exercise in the fresh air, and when he was hungry was permitted to eat dry bread at all times. He soon developed into a well-formed lad, and the judicious treatment to which he was subjected so far mended his temper that he became quite lovable, and was a great favourite with his father, who never cared much for Louis.

Vittorino's darling at this time was the tiny Gian Lucido, then only three years old. On him the master built great hopes, for, though he was too young as yet to display any definite bent of character, it would be possible to guard him from evil influences, and to guide him in the way of learning and piety.

It was a fixed principle in Vittorino's mind that a child is never too young to learn. Nevertheless, he was far from wishing to bring up precocious or priggish children, but rather to follow the course of nature, helping the gradual development of

all the faculties and powers of mind and body, without constraint and without undue hastening of the processes. Little Gian must have playthings. Why, then, should he not play with ivory letters of different colours and take pleasure in learning their names? After a time he might group them, and it was so arranged that the grouping of the various colours worked out into syllables.

The child must talk, and it was quite as easy to teach him to speak correctly from the first as to give him lessons which he must unlearn. For this reason Vittorino would never allow the presence of servants or others whose speech was rude and uneducated. From their earliest years the children were taught to consider Latin as the language of school, and they learnt it easily, and soon became fluent in speech and writing. Greek was begun, like Latin, in play, and grew more serious as the child advanced, but it was never made a burdensome or distasteful task.

Vittorino, remembering his own early deficiencies in Mathematics, gave the first

lessons to the little ones in the form of games, and increased the difficulties with the age and capacity of each. Gian Lucido responded to the cultivation lavished upon him by his cheerful instructor, and was often a consolation to Vittorino when the slowness of Louis or the carelessness of Carlo discouraged him.

The studies were well in hand when Prince John Francis returned from his expedition. His soldierly love of discipline led him to approve of the stern repression of all softness and effeminacy. Bitter complaints reached him from the noble families whose children had been dismissed by Vittorino, but he took this as a matter of course, and supported the vigorous and sweeping reforms, which appealed to his military instincts. He was delighted with the results already achieved, and expressed his warm approbation of all that Vittorino had done.

The improvement already perceptible in the deportment of Louis was a source of great gratification to the father, while with Carlo he was so pleased that he had a com-

plete suit of armour made to fit him, and promised to take him on one of his campaigns if he continued to grow more manly as he was now doing. This predilection for Carlo was a source of anxiety to Vittorino, for he feared the jealous nature of Louis, and all his tact and prudence were necessary to keep the breach between father and son, and brother and brother, from widening already into the dimensions it assumed later on.

There were girls, too, in Vittorino's school. Margherita Gonzaga was the centre of a group of young ladies whose parents wished them to be taught Latin and Greek like their brothers. Vittorino was quite willing to take them in charge, for he was of opinion that ladies of rank should be educated in such a manner as to develop all their talents, that they might be able to take their places with credit in whatever position they occupied. He was no friend to the frivolous gossip and light conversation in which many ladies passed their time, as is too well described in the pages of Boccaccio and other writers.

He believed that the remedy for such disorders was a serious and solid grounding in knowledge both sacred and profane. But he did not overlook the fact that needlework and other feminine accomplishments were necessary. These he entrusted to certain ladies of the court upon whom he could depend, and he never failed to keep watch over their progress and conduct. Margherita proved so docile and teachable that, when a few years later she married Lionello d'Este, she was regarded as one of the most learned and accomplished ladies in Italy. She was, however, far surpassed by her younger sister, Cecilia.

Cecilia Gonzaga was born in 1425, and consequently owed her whole education to the Joyous House and its teachers. Vittorino considered himself responsible for her training from her most tender years. He employed the same devices for her and for her brother Alexander, who was born in 1427, as he had used in the case of Gian, but he began earlier with the two former, since the latter only came into his hands at the age of three.

These younger children were the great triumph of Vittorino's methods, and they profited in the most remarkable manner by his efforts in their behalf. If they had faults, his training seemed to have extirpated them; and yet they were real children, simple, joyous, unrestrained, ready for play and laughter, and withal pious at prayer-time and studious in the class-room. It was charming to hear these babes lisping in Latin or Greek, just as our modern children speak French, Italian, or German in the nursery. Their parents were more and more delighted as time went on, and they also improved under the influence of the gentle tutor of their children. John Francis had begun by inviting the scholar to his court for the sake of appearances, to keep up his dignity and reputation among the Italian princes, but he ended by placing himself under the direction of Vittorino and asking his advice on all important matters.

As for the Lady Paola, she never looked upon Vittorino as other than a saint. Seeing closely his life of self-sacrificing devotedness to her children and his other

pupils, she was stimulated by his example to perform acts of virtue unthought of before his arrival. Day by day he went forth to the hospital, offering his charitable services to the sick and afflicted, while he was ever ready to share his last coin with the distressed poor. When she saw him looking particularly threadbare she would have a new cloak or gown made for him, but though he would accept her gift and wear it to give her pleasure, she knew that the other garment went to clothe the first poor man who asked for an alms.

It would be impossible to say how many indigent scholars owed him their education, nor perhaps how many abused his bounty and paid him with ingratitude. Yet whatever came of his charity it made no difference to the holy man himself, whose patience and humility were proof against all trials.

With his example constantly before her the Lady Paola made rapid progress in virtue. She, who had hitherto been contented with an idle and luxurious life, now began to understand the sweetness of mor-

tification and self-denial. The poor at her gate, who had formerly been left to the tender mercies of servants, now received relief from her own hands or under her personal supervision, and in imitation of Vittorino she was often to be found in the city ministering to the sick in their own homes or in the hospital. Day by day she laboured more, until her fame went forth among the poor of Mantua as their protectress and Lady Bountiful for whom their prayers ascended to the throne of God. Thus did the Princess become the pupil of her children's tutor, not indeed in the school-room, although she profited by his learning also, but chiefly in the school of sanctity in which he was so proficient a master.

The correspondence with Guarino did not flag throughout these busy months, and soon an interesting little negotiation was taking place. Guarino's son, Gregorio, was able to walk and talk, and, if he were not still too young, the father wished for nothing better than to place him under the care of Vittorino. The fame of Guarino as a Greek scholar was great; he belonged to

a good family, and Vittorino had strong hopes that the Gonzagas would make no difficulty about the admission of Gregorio. The question was proposed, and the decision left entirely to Vittorino's discretion. The result was a cordial letter to Guarino, accepting the proposal, and adding a hope that he would find it possible to bring his boy to Mantua himself. Guarino was delighted; the distance from Verona to Mantua was not too great, and the road was direct; he would have a litter prepared and bring his wife too, for he was anxious that she should see his dear friend and the great school of the lordly Gonzagas. Accordingly, it was one day announced to Vittorino that a lady and a child in a litter, accompanied by a gentleman on horseback, were approaching, and with great joy he went out to meet and welcome them to the Joyous House. The matron was called to attend to the lady and the little Gregorio, while Guarino and Vittorino renewed their intercourse as if they had never been separated.

The visit was a happy one on both sides,

and not without much mutual profit. The friends talked over the problems of the day, and came to similar conclusions on current educational topics. Both were impressed by the fact that pomp and show had much to do with the new learning; that there was much that was merely superficial in the talk of scholars and their patrons; and that, above all, there was great danger in the reckless eagerness with which pagan art, literature and ideals were being adopted. Vittorino blamed especially the subtle disquisitions then in vogue. "I want my pupils to think," he said, "not to split hairs."

It gave strength and encouragement to both these honest men and distinguished scholars thus to talk over the puzzles which constantly met them in daily life; for it has always been and will ever be that those who hold the right opinions with regard to innovations are afraid to trust to their own single judgment lest they should be narrow and retrograde. Guarino and Vittorino found themselves of one mind, and were supported by the knowledge of each other's

approval and sympathy. When the time came for parting, it was with the prospect of more frequent meetings, now that little Gregorio formed a link between them.

Another scholar who sent his sons to Mantua about this time was Filelfo. They were clever and promising boys, and won Vittorino's heart, though he did not approve of their father's morals or manners. His vanity and conceit were greater than ever, and he made no scruple of unwarrantably attacking the clergy and the religious orders. No one was safe from his biting and sarcastic pen, except, perhaps, Vittorino, for whom he always entertained the deepest respect. The fact that he sent his sons to be made scholars at the Joyous House is the strongest testimony to the esteem in which he held the master.

The sons of Poggio, another eminent scholar, unfortunately in no better repute than Filelfo, also became boarders at Mantua, and in this way the school continued to increase in numbers. Another house was taken to accommodate the newcomers, and work went on merrily. The

reputation of the school attracted a constant stream of visitors, and Vittorino's library, containing many rare and valuable manuscripts, was the resort of scholars of renown. Copyists were always in his employment, whether for his own purposes or those of his learned friends, to whom he was pleased to present facsimiles of his precious books. He was a generous donor, and a lender too, though he often had to regret the facility with which he gave ear to the requests of borrowers.

Vittorino had always worked hard, but these were days of almost incredible labour. In the early hours of the morning he was astir, and would awaken some backward pupils who required extra attention. He made a point of securing these quiet moments for reciting his Office and his accustomed prayers. Before Mass he said morning prayers with his pupils, and after the Holy Sacrifice they recited with him the Office of Our Lady, and he gave them a short instruction in their religious duties. An hour or so was always spent by him in visiting his sick in the hospitals, and he

sometimes had occasion to go on charitable errands to the prisons also. When class began he had his own lectures to give, and to this he added general superintendence of the whole school.

Nothing escaped his vigilant eye, that eye which no wrong-doer ever dared to meet, according to the testimony of his disciples, who had experienced the power of his penetrating glance. When he could not attend to some point needing explanation, or administer some well-merited reproof, he would tell the child concerned to speak to him in the afternoon. All was done with quietness, order, and method, and no time was lost.

Recreation preceded the midday meal. No matter what the weather, it had to be taken out of doors in the playing-fields. His intention was to prepare his boys for life, and he well knew that as men they would be obliged to do duty in all kinds of weather, when rain or wind would be no excuse for omitting or postponing the task in hand. He shared in their athletic exercises himself, and always remained their

example in this as in all other things, never alleging his age as a reason for staying indoors or taking any repose.

The playing-fields were a scene of great animation during the recreation hour. Boys on swift horses rode over the plain; others competed in the foot-race. They fenced and wrestled, or practised archery, or played at ball or tennis, while some went down to the lake-like reaches of the river to bathe or fish. Mimic fights were organised, and then the master was as excited as the most warlike of his pupils. He would put himself at the head of one party and charge the foe; then, when the weaker side began to lose, he went to their rescue and led them to victory. Loud was the shouting, fierce the combat, and the dust rose round the young warriors as they played at Greeks and Trojans, Romans and Carthaginians, or Christians and Turks. Laurel wreaths were won by the victors, and dire disgrace was the portion of cowards. Vittorino made use of these games to train his scholars to be fearless in danger and careless of bodily

comfort. The time passed all too quickly, and even Louis would forget that he had not dined.

At a given signal, when traces of battle or the chase had been removed, the children assembled in the dining-hall, where Vittorino and his assistant-masters were awaiting them. The grace of the Breviary was said before, as after, meals, and all sat down to a repast flavoured with the best of all spices, honest hunger. But Vittorino would allow no excess, nor would he countenance daintiness in food or drink. He ate so little himself that the elder scholars would at times remonstrate, but he only passed off their representations with a playful jest. "We differ in this," he would say: "I prevent you from eating what you wish, and you would have me want for nothing." During the meal it was customary to have a reading made from some moral author or from a religious work, so that the dining-room of the Joyous House resembled somewhat a monastic refectory. But the apparent austerity was mitigated by the master's cheerfulness and

the individual attention of which each was the object.

During the noonday siesta Vittorino took but little rest. He had a portion of his Office to say, letters to read, if not to write, and a hundred details of management to arrange. As soon as the great heat had passed, the school assembled for study and private tuition. This was the time for interviewing the remiss, for pushing on the backward, and for urging the talented to compose orations or poems, or to do other original work.

A very important portion of the programme was the exercise of reading or reciting aloud. If manliness and vigour were cultivated in the recreation hour, elegance and polish had their turn at the reading lesson. The greatest trouble was taken with the cultivation of the voice, the manner of breathing, pronunciation and all the other details which go to make up an easy and elegant delivery. Many of the boys would, in their future career, have orations to deliver on special occasions, even if they did not become orators by

profession, and it was, therefore, necessary that all should make a thorough study of the art.

But it was not only for public life that Vittorino prepared his scholars. They were to become cultured gentlemen, and elegance was to be added to the agility and grace acquired by athletic exercises. For this purpose nothing could be more beneficial than the training in speech and gesture given at the reading lesson. Like the ancient Romans, the master attached to this exercise a certain hygienic value. It was, he considered, an aid to digestion, and made up, in cold weather, for the artificial heat of fires, to which he had a strong objection. The minutest attention was given to external defects, and nothing in speech, gesture or carriage was left unnoticed. It was no wonder, therefore, that the children of the Joyous House grew up into almost perfect men and women, many of them becoming the astonishment and delight of the age in which they lived.

In the cool of the evening there was another hour or so of recreation. Games

were again organised, and all were obliged to take part in them. The hours of silence and study were, in the master's opinion, sufficiently long, and playtime was not to be taken up with lessons.

One day as he was going out late to the grounds, having been detained by an important visitor, he met two boys engaged in a serious discussion. Approaching them in his impetuous fashion, he inquired the meaning of their absence from recreation. Finding that they were trying to solve a problem occurring in the previous lesson, he rebuked them sharply, telling them that they must remember that there is a time for work and a time for relaxation, and that one must not be allowed to encroach upon the other. Seeing the two culprits penitently hastening to obey, he joined them, and with merry jests soon caused them to drown in laughter the remembrance of their discomfiture.

Thus he maintained discipline in his school, and it was almost unheard of that any measures severer than rebukes or persuasion should be employed. He pos-

sessed that secret and mysterious influence to be met with in the born teacher and so difficult to define. The magnetism of his personality permeated his school, and subdued stubborn wills into docility and obedience. His entrance into a room, his glance, a single word, sufficed to restore order when turbulent spirits needed repression. It was only on very serious occasions that flashes of his fiery temper were perceived, and once called forth they were efficacious and never to be forgotten.

Once, when Carlo was almost grown up, he returned to the school from an expedition on which his father had taken him. His military experiences and the society of soldiers had not improved him. The master was aware of this, but had not as yet perceived any definite ill behaviour. It happened, however, that in passing near the tennis-ground where Carlo was playing, he stopped for a moment to watch an exciting point in the game. Suddenly Carlo made a bad stroke, and in his vexation swore a soldier's oath. At once the wrath of Vittorino flamed forth; he sprang upon the

youth, seized him by the hair, and administered sound chastisement. Then he addressed him in words of severe reproof, placing before him the offence against God, the evil example given to others, especially to the younger boys, and the bitter pain inflicted upon himself, who had taken so much trouble with his education. Carlo was at first thunderstruck by the violence of the attack, but coming to himself and realising the justice of his tutor's anger, he melted into tears, fell upon his knees imploring forgiveness, and promised that he would correct the bad habit. Vittorino, as quick to pardon as to punish, raised the youth, and embracing him, with tears in his eyes, thanked God for the faith and docility of his disciple.

The evening recreation was followed by night prayers, said in the school chapel by Vittorino himself, who never deputed this duty, nor that of religious instruction, to another. When his pupils had retired to rest, he took advantage of the peaceful hours of the night to read and write and pray, for his life did not admit of solitude

during the day. Not unfrequently he would spend a part of this time in teaching one or other of the many pupils to whom he could not attend during school hours. Then, after a short time given to repose, he was at work again, and had begun another busy, happy day among his children. Thus in piety and charity and learning the weeks and months went by, while sweet cheerfulness gave zest to every labour and lightened every care.

CHAPTER VI

HOLIDAYS AND VISITORS

ON a beautiful morning in early summer there was a great stir in the Joyous House. Servants were running to and fro; boys were busily employed in collecting an infinite number of things and heaping them up in the hall, that they might be packed into the large wicker baskets standing ready to receive them; the matron was giving orders; and in the midst of all, cool, calm and happy, was the master, superintending the preparations. Even Louis was active and merry, as if about to enjoy himself thoroughly. Mass was over and breakfast had been taken in haste, for the journey before them must be made while the day was in its first freshness.

All being ready, the whole school set off down the avenue, with many a leap and

shout, and directed their course northward. On reaching the river-bank they found horses and boats awaiting them. Some of the elder boys mounted the horses; the younger ones were soon settled in the boats; attendants were there with sumpter-horses carrying luggage; while two strong men in each boat were ready to row against the current, for they were going up-stream in the direction of Lake Garda.

Their destination was Goito, a large village about twelve miles north of Mantua, where there was a castle of the Gonzagas, and where the holidays were to be spent. In those times there were no school holidays in our sense of the word, but on account of malarial fever it would have been imprudent to remain in Mantua during the summer. Hence the school was always moved to Goito at this time of the year.

The change was beneficial in every way. It broke the monotony of school-life, and improved the children's health by giving them opportunities for mountain climbing and other forms of exercise not to be found in the island city. Therefore it was that

on this balmy morning Vittorino and his little ones embarked with joyous hearts, and held animated converse with the big boys as they curvetted on their prancing steeds. All was brightness and merriment, and the master was brimful of happiness as he gazed upon his beloved children in their innocent enjoyment.

At a signal from Vittorino, the boats, propelled by strong arms, gaily mounted the stream, between the winding banks lined with sedge and rushes, and the horses trotted noiselessly upon the rich green carpet of grass. Vittorino could not help quoting Virgil's praise of his beloved river, as he saw how truly the poet had described it by a touch or two in the *Eclogues*.

The sun rose higher and threatened heat, but the willows gave sufficient shade for the time that the journey lasted. The village with its church tower came in sight, and soon the party, assembled on the river bank, was falling into order for the march up the hill to the castle, whose battlements frowned down from its crest. As they

passed through the single street, women and children came to the doors of the cottages and respectfully saluted their young lords.

It was a brilliant train that passed between those two rows of thatched houses, exciting the astonishment and admiration of the quiet villagers. The gaily-dressed young nobles in all the bravery of richly-coloured silks and velvets, with feathered caps and gold and silver ornaments gleaming in the sunshine, were like a scene from fairyland bursting suddenly into the monotony of daily life. A crowd of little urchins soon joined the procession, and some of the scholars amused themselves by playfully tossing handfuls of small coins to invite a general scramble. When they reached the parish church, Vittorino bade them enter and do homage to our Lord's real Presence in the Blessed Sacrament. He said aloud a prayer that their sojourn in Goito might be blessed, and that they might be preserved from all evil both of soul and body.

A suitable staff of servants had been sent

forward, and the castle was ready for its noisy, hungry guests, who were for the present relieved from the ordinary restrictions of school-life, and who rejoiced in the unwonted liberty. The days passed in pleasant fashion, the only lessons given being in physical training, reading and oratory. The customary religious duties were attended to with the same punctuality as at home, for Vittorino always gave the first place to piety, and would never admit of any relaxation on that point. He took a few of the elder boys by turns to the village to seek out the poor and sick, and those who needed help. By his kindness and cordial charity he endeared himself to all the villagers, and contributed much to the popularity of the Gonzaga family.

From Goito they sometimes made excursions into the surrounding country. On one occasion, even, the master took the elder boys to Verona, where they were received with enthusiastic welcome at the house and school of Guarino. He was delighted to see his boy, who, though much younger than the rest of the privileged

party, was a sturdy little fellow, and was able to make the long journey on horseback like the others. Gregorio's mother was overjoyed at this unlooked-for meeting with her son, and thanked Vittorino again and again for his thoughtful kindness.

After having refreshed themselves, the company went out, under the guidance of Guarino, to see the sights of the city. Even had not his friend been there, Verona would yet have had its attractions for Vittorino. It was then, as it is still, full of historical associations. Its most remarkable monument, the wonderful amphitheatre built of red marble, is of immense size, nearly equalling, it is said, the Coliseum at Rome. Here the master and his pupils spent so much of their time that there was but little left to give to other sights. They managed, however, to glance at the memorials of Dante's four years' residence in Verona. Promising themselves to return at some future date, they said farewell to Guarino and left him in his famous school with his pupils. This was a happy day for all, and provided food for thought and

for conversation during many hours. Those who had been privileged to go to Verona had much to relate, while those who had remained at home were never tired of hearing of a visit which they hoped to make for themselves when old enough.

It was at Goito that the Prior of the neighbouring Camaldolese monastery first became acquainted with Vittorino. They were introduced to each other by the famous scholar Niccoli, who entertained the highest regard for both of them. Father Ambrose belonged to the noble family of the Traversari, and after a distinguished life at various courts and universities, had consecrated himself to God in the religious state. He was exactly the same age as Vittorino, having been born in 1378, and was remarkable for his learning and for the personal sanctity and austerity which, however, never obtruded itself upon the attention of those with whom he associated. Before many years went by he was chosen Superior General of his Order, which was flourishing and in high esteem in Italy. Ambrose, too, was a teacher, but he was attracted to

Vittorino less for the sake of his educational methods than for the love of books, which the library of the Joyous House provided so generously.

The master was invited by the scholarly monk to come and see his monastery and his collection of manuscripts. The pupils shared the invitation, and were promised a delightful excursion under the care of the brethren, who would place themselves at their disposal for the day. It was settled that the senior division of the school should be allowed to go, and one beautiful morning saw them set out for the hills.

The journey was not long, but it ended in a tough climb towards the buildings which could be seen upon a height with their beautiful Gothic church in the centre. Round the church were grouped the different portions of the monastery, with its cloisters uniting it to the hospice. A lay brother, working in the grounds, gave notice of their approach to the Father Prior, who came forth to meet them, greeting them with genial hospitality and cheerful courtesy. Refreshments were provided for

the boys under the shady trees, and, while Ambrose took Vittorino within doors, the monks waited upon their young guests and smilingly pressed them to do honour to the repast of sweet white bread with milk and fruit.

The day was spent in exploring the mountains, where there were beautiful walks and climbs with glorious views of the country round about. The good Fathers devoted themselves entirely to the entertainment of the boys and showed them every object of interest. They were allowed to approach within a respectful distance of the Hermitage, where they could see the solitaries in various attitudes of prayer or labour among the rocks. Attached to every Camaldolese monastery is a secluded part called the Hermitage, where monks, drawn to a solitary life, may retire for a time, or, if they choose, until death. The children looked with awe upon these white-robed figures voluntarily separated from their brethren for the purpose of conversing more freely with God; and they heard with wonder that several of the bright-faced,

kindly Fathers who were entertaining them had been hermits themselves in their time, and were none the worse for their temporary seclusion.

It was interesting to watch the monks in their white, girdled tunics with scapular and long white mantle, their heads covered with immense broad-brimmed hats to protect them from the sun, and their long beards allowed to grow, although their hair was shaved from the head except in one narrow circle. They seemed beings from another world, and truly looked more like angels than like men. Several of the youths made up their minds on the spot to become Camaldolese monks, and in some cases the vocation was a true one, and was followed in later years, for there was every inducement to a youth of pious and scholarly tastes to come and pass his days in this home of sanctity and learning.

Meanwhile, Vittorino had visited the fine library of the monastery and was engaged in earnest discourse with his new friend, Prior Ambrose Traversari. They were kindred spirits, and found delight in learned

discussions upon the topics of the literary world of the day. But besides this they entered into spiritual converse on God and heavenly things; and, leaving the library, paced up and down the cool and shady cloister, realising more and more at each instant that their hearts were chiefly set upon the great glory of eternal life, rather than upon the passing things of earth.

Gradually Vittorino began to feel that this new friend was a man of God, who could understand and direct him aright. He revealed to Ambrose the great uncertainty of his life, the question which had so often perplexed him—whether he should not do better to retire from the world and secure his salvation as a religious, or whether he should continue his labours in a court for the sake of others. Prior Ambrose was a man of wide experience, and had little difficulty in finding a wise and conclusive answer to Vittorino's anxious questioning. The happiness of the latter in the great work he had undertaken, and the absence of a distinct call to a religious life, proved that the present course

was the right one. If God wished Vittorino to change, He would not fail to manifest His Will, but, until He did so, there could be no holier manner of service than in the position marked out for him in the Mantuan court. This decisive counsel was sufficient for the humble Vittorino, and never after did he feel the slightest uncertainty or anxiety in his vocation.

There were regrets on both sides when the time for departure came. The Fathers had greatly enjoyed the visit of these noble, well-bred youths, with their incomparable master, and they begged that the visit might be repeated each year. Vittorino was only too pleased to promise this, for a day in such a place was a lesson of edification to himself as well as to his disciples. There is a letter still in existence which Father Ambrose wrote about this time, giving a pleasing description of the life led at Goito by Vittorino and his scholars. He tells how master and pupils were on terms of the most perfect affection, like happy children under the care of an indulgent and beloved father, who shared their interests

and joined in their amusements, whether games in the castle grounds, or walks and rides among the mountains.

On another day the whole school went up the Mincio to its source in Lake Garda. Even the little ones could join in this lengthy excursion, because they could be conveyed in boats, and the elder ones could ride. This was mainly a fishing expedition, for the clear waters of the lake are full of a great variety of fish. But the lovely scenery and the delightful verdure would have been a sufficient attraction on these hot summer days, even without the lessons in angling given by Vittorino, and the fruit-picking from the heavily-laden trees. Mulberries, figs, grapes, the olive and the citron were there at choice, so that with discretion and superintendence the children could be allowed to transgress the home law which condemned eating between meals. The master was not as severe in his proscription of fruit as he was in that of sweetmeats, though he was careful to secure moderation. Those who could swim took delight in visiting the many islands of the

Cecilia's interview with her father. [p. 162

lake, and the younger ones could learn with safety in the shallower waters. Swimming-matches were organised; boat-races gave occasion for sharp competition with the oar, and the elder boys were encouraged to mimic the naval battles of Greek and Roman history. These games were watched from the shore with eager excitement. Shouts of encouragement or reproach urged the competitors to greater efforts, and the victors were crowned with laurels by the master himself.

Thus the summer glided swiftly away in serene happiness, and early in the month of September preparations were made for return to Mantua. The journey homewards was made in much the same way as the other, except that it was quicker, because the boats went with the current instead of against it, and that instead of the fresh greenness of the banks, grey and brown tints had begun to appear. There was joy in the thought of meeting parents and of seeing once more the Joyous House with its dear associations. The Prince and Princess were charmed with the growth and healthy

appearance of the children, and they blessed God for the admirable tutor He had sent them in Vittorino. Louis was now reduced to proper proportions, and was much taller. Carlo was growing fast still, but he had lost his ungainly appearance, and was a handsome boy. Lessons began again, and all went on as before through the autumn, winter and spring, for though the feasts of Christmas and Easter were kept with great solemnity, there was no thought in those days of protracted holidays.

Vittorino would allow none but himself to give the finishing touches to Latin, Philosophy and Mathematics; but he did not consider himself sufficiently proficient in Greek to conclude the education of his pupils in that language, although his own progress in it was a marvel to his contemporaries. He rightly judged that for perfection in any tongue it is necessary that the teacher should be a native of the country to which the language belongs. He sought, therefore, for a Greek professor of reputation, and his choice fell upon Theodore

Gaza, who seemed to combine all desirable qualities.

This distinguished scholar was not quite thirty years of age when he took up his abode in Mantua, and at that time he had probably not developed the faults for which he became notorious in later life. As he was eighty years of age at his death, and as it was at Rome that he first showed the vanity and self-assertion which caused him to throw the Pope's money into the Tiber rather than accept an insufficient reward for his services, it may be supposed that his earlier years were free from glaring defects. However this may be, Theodore Gaza taught for several years in the Joyous House, and appears to have given satisfaction. Wishing to improve his position he then withdrew, and made room for a younger, though not a more edifying, countryman of his, George of Trebizond.

This young Greek had not yet quite finished his education when Vittorino accepted him as assistant-master. George was to learn Latin, and his lessons in Greek were to be given under the direct

superintendence of the master himself. Like his predecessor, he never seemed to become an integral portion of the establishment, whose strict regulations did not meet with his full approbation. He was, indeed, too short-tempered, fiery and eccentric to be long satisfied with any position. Nevertheless he worked hard in the Joyous House, teaching Greek and learning Latin. That he was not without appreciation or gratitude is proved by his own words: "If I know anything of Latin letters, it is, after God, to thee, O Vittorino, my master, that I owe it."

The life of George of Trebizond was passed in continual changes from one place to another. Naples and Rome were chiefly favoured by him, and it was in the latter city that one of the most disgraceful scenes of the age took place between himself and Poggio, when they came to blows over a translation from Greek into Latin which they were executing for the Pope. Vittorino was not fortunate in his selection of Greek professors, but he managed them in his gentle and tactful way, and prevented them

from harming his scholars by their bad example.

Father Ambrose had promised to come and see the Joyous House at the first opportunity. He was as good as his word, and received a right royal welcome. Every attention was lavished upon him by Vittorino, who gave the Prior an absolutely free hand in his library, placing his most precious treasures at his disposal. He had already won the hearts of the scholars, and his visit to their school only deepened the respect and admiration which they felt towards him. After their own beloved master there was soon no one who had so firm a hold upon their affections as the holy and learned Camaldolese monk.

Vittorino took Ambrose round the house, showed him its arrangement and explained his method of holding the school. The boys were proud during the recreation hour to exhibit to him their pets, and all the wonderful belongings which occupied their spare moments. Ambrose expressed in a letter to his monks the pleasure he derived from this hospitable reception. "I have

reached Mantua," he says, "and Vittorino, that best of men and dearest of friends, has given me the kindest welcome. Every moment that he can spare from his important work is given to me; and he not only attends to me himself, but encourages his pupils to do the same. Among them are several so advanced in Greek that they translate it into Latin as an exercise. He teaches Greek not only to the boys, but to the girls, and they all write the language." This was the first of many visits that Father Ambrose paid to the Joyous House, and he watched with pleasure the improvement in the young princes, and the manner in which they profited by their training.

Guarino also rode over from Verona now and then to see how Gregorio was getting on, and to talk on learned matters with his old friend. He had much to say of his school, of his successes and disappointments; of his writings, and of the harsh and jealous criticisms which they drew from his rivals. Guarino lacked the serenity, the humility and the disinterestedness so conspicuous in Vittorino, and his hot temper

and eagerness to excel others gave occasion to bitter invectives and cruel satires. Filelfo was one of his enemies, and as for Poggio, he never seemed to be happy unless he was vilifying the unfortunate Guarino, solely because he was a solid Greek scholar. Vittorino was always much distressed to hear of Guarino's wrongs, but he could only comfort him by sympathy. In Verona, too, Guarino made political enemies on account of his ability in public business. He was so weary of this life at times that he was sorely tempted to quit his native city, and take up a position like that of Vittorino in the house of some prince or noble.

In 1430 an invitation reached him which pleased his fancy so much that he accepted it. Nicholas d'Este, Marquis of Ferrara, invited him to undertake the completion of the education of his son Lionello, who was at that time twenty-three years of age and affianced to Margherita Gonzaga. Lionello after his earlier studies had spent some years at a military school, and his father was desirous that he should now receive the learning and culture becoming his posi-

tion. By the advice of Vittorino a school was begun at Ferrara similar to that of Mantua. It succeeded so well that Lionello, after a few years under Guarino's tuition, became one of the most polished and scholarly princes of Italy. Thus did the two teachers prepare, on the one hand Lionello d'Este, and on the other Margherita his wife, two of the noblest men and women of their time, to fulfil the duties of their exalted position.

Vittorino's fame soon spread far and wide, and, though all unconscious of the honour, he was highly esteemed by Cardinals and by the Popes themselves. Pope Eugenius IV had a very high regard for him, which he testified on many occasions. A certain monk once presented to the Holy Father a petition asking to be allowed to study under Vittorino in his school at Mantua. "Go, my son," said the Pope; "willingly do we give you into the charge of the holiest of living men." Vittorino has never been canonised, but if ever a man was, during his lifetime, proclaimed a saint by the Sovereign Pontiff, it was he.

And this was the man, to all appearance so insignificant, who had chosen to be a school-master, and that alone. He might have surrounded himself with pomp and state, and gone from city to city parading his accomplishments; but he chose to shut himself up in his school-room with his beloved children, teaching them the way wherein they should walk, that they might become worthy sons of God and of the Church. He applied himself to the duty of the day and the hour without a single thought of his own advantage or honour. Herein lay his enormous power for good, far more than in the books he might have written or in the orations he might have delivered, had he chosen. Pupils came to him from far and near, and he received them all, provided they fulfilled his conditions of good character and studious habits. Gain was no object with him, and his care was equally lavished on poor and rich, so that his impartiality was one of the most remarkable features of his method. His influence was widespread throughout Europe, and was probably an important

factor in the splendid opposition made by many to the torrent of paganism soon to come sweeping over the learned world, overthrowing in its course the simple faith of the Middle Ages, and ending in the so-called Protestant Reformation. Had it not been for Vittorino and Guarino, and teachers like them, there would have been less power of resistance, and God alone could have preserved the Church from sinking into a wild abyss of confusion and disorder. Therefore it was that grace kept him in the world without being of the world, and did not allow him to follow his inclination by burying his virtues and talents in a Camaldolese or other hermitage; and Vittorino was nobly true to the vocation which was to produce such mighty results.

But it was not only for the severer studies that the Joyous House was so justly celebrated. It was frequented by men from all countries in search of the most varied branches of learning. One day there arrived a travel-stained Carthusian monk

who sadly needed the attentions of the hospitable matron. When he had been refreshed Vittorino entered, and greeting him with his usual cordiality inquired his business. The monk was a refined and cultured scholar, and had come all the way from the Netherlands to obtain information on the science of music, which was so well cultivated in the Joyous House that its reputation had extended even to the cold and sluggish countries of the north.

The patience with which Vittorino attended to importunate requests involving time and labour was only equalled by the liberality with which he bestowed alms and pecuniary assistance, especially on poor scholars. He never refused to give as long as anything remained to him. The treasures of his mind were, indeed, inexhaustible, and were lavished on all without a thought of thanks or gain; but his purse was not fathomless. Often he was obliged to take advantage of the generous permission accorded by Gonzaga, to draw what he required from the treasury, but there was a

limit even to this. As a last resource he would apply to his wealthier pupils, or to rich citizens of Mantua, and he never begged in vain. In spite of all this, however, he found it impossible to cope with the ever-increasing strain upon his charity, and when he died he had to be buried at the expense of his pupil Louis, then Marquis of Mantua.

Meantime Vittorino's first charges were growing up, and others were sharing equally his love and labour. His circle of friends and admirers was enlarging, and adding to the toil that came in the daily round. It was a practice of his never to lose sight of his pupils when they left him for camp, court or literary life, and they were steadfast in their affection for their beloved master. It would be a long task to enumerate all the great Churchmen, princes, soldiers and scholars who looked back to Vittorino as the man to whom they owed their success in life and their fidelity to God and the Church.

His biographer, Prendilacqua, a native

of Mantua, was a fine scholar brought up in the Joyous House. So, too, was Castiglione, a man of wit and eloquence, and remarkable for the elegance of his style, who wrote a book which made him famous, entitled *The Courtier*, a manual of instruction on the manners and etiquette of court life. His ability was such that he was sent to England on a diplomatic mission to Henry VII. Manfred, Lord of Imola, one of the most notable Italians of the fifteenth century, did credit to the Joyous House by his conduct throughout life, whether as soldier, statesman or scholar. John Andrea, afterwards Bishop of Algeria, another pupil of Vittorino, was so esteemed at Rome for his learning that he was appointed by the Pope superintendent of the first printing-press erected in the city. This list might be prolonged indefinitely, and extended far beyond the Italian peninsula. From the city of Mantua the influence of the great master radiated as from a centre to far-distant lands. Each pupil went forth to form a new centre from which the light

spread, and other schools arose on the model of that of Vittorino, where the same lessons were taught and the same virtues practised. The household of Blessed Thomas More, in our own land, was in the following century a perfect copy of the life in the Joyous House as organised by Vittorino da Feltre.

CHAPTER VII

VITTORINO'S LAST YEARS

IN the year 1433 Pope Eugenius IV crowned the German Emperor, Sigismund, in Rome. This was a time of festivity for all the partisans of the empire in Italy, and there was high holiday in Mantua when the newly-crowned Emperor passed through the city and rested for a while in the palace of the Gonzagas. John Francis had deserved well of Sigismund by his feats of arms in the cause which he had espoused, and the Emperor proved his appreciation of these services by conferring upon him the rank of Marquis of the Empire.

Great were the rejoicings in the city, and the school was not excluded from the general celebrations. The children were encouraged to write Latin verses in honour of the distinguished guest, and prizes were

offered to those who attained the high level of excellence required for so great an occasion. Gian Lucido Gonzaga, then in his fourteenth year, executed so admirable a piece of work that, during the summer holiday, Vittorino took him, as a reward, to see his friend, Father Ambrose. The Prior writes in one of his letters: "Vittorino brought to see me yesterday the young son of the Marquis of Mantua, Gian Lucido, aged about fourteen. In my presence he recited two hundred lines of Latin verse composed by himself. It described the celebrations for the reception given to the Emperor Sigismund in the city of Mantua. The accuracy of the language, and the elegance of delivery, added much to the beauty of the little poem. The dear boy then showed me two propositions which he had added to the geometry of Euclid."

The monk goes on to mention Cecilia, the little sister of Gian Lucido, on whose education Vittorino had bestowed the greatest care almost from her birth. When she was six years old she knew enough Latin to be promoted to Greek, as we learn

from the fact that a Greek grammar is put down to her account in the family expenses. From this time she made such rapid progress that Father Ambrose relates the wonder to his correspondent in these words: "There is also a daughter of the Marquis at the school, who, though only ten years old, writes Greek with such elegance that, I am ashamed to acknowledge, scarcely any of my own pupils can approach it." Both Gian Lucido and Cecilia were perfect little prodigies, and yet they were the simplest and most natural children possible, quite unconscious of their own accomplishments. This was owing to Vittorino's wonderful way of bringing them up, and so careful was he to prevent visitors from showing astonishment at their performances that the children considered what they did as the most ordinary thing in the world.

Alexander was the youngest of the family. He was endowed with a most keen and penetrating mind, but his delicate health interfered with his education. His highly-strung nature required restraint rather than stimulation in study, and Vitto-

rino feared in his case the danger of over-pressure. This did not, however, prevent the boy from having a Latin Psalter bought for him when he was four years old. Alexander and Cecilia enjoyed the uninterrupted attention of the master from their babyhood, and proved the truth of his maxims that no age is too young to learn, and that nothing should ever be learnt which must be unlearned at any time of life.

At the time of the Emperor Sigismund's visit to Mantua, Louis was about twenty years old. He was no longer the indolent, spoilt boy of some ten years earlier. His training had nobly developed all that was good in him, physically, mentally and morally. He was now well proportioned and active, quick-witted and alert, with easy speech, gracious manners, and a general air of refinement; condescending towards his inferiors, and deeply penetrated with the spirit of religion. Carlo, however, was still his father's favourite, because he surpassed Louis in military qualities, and would have been a more presentable heir,

had he happened to be the eldest son. Louis had not yet succeeded in conquering his jealousy, and was seized periodically with uncontrollable fits of melancholy. He could not brook being left at home when Carlo was taken out to camp or to join in the warlike expeditions, which were of frequent occurrence.

Pope Eugenius IV was a native of Venice, and showed his partiality for that republic in such a way as to offend the Visconti of Milan. The Marquis of Gonzaga, as "General of the Army of the Church," was, of course, on the side of the Pope, and was also always ready to fight for Venice, especially against the Visconti, his hereditary foes. In the turmoil that ensued the Marquis was frequently in the field, and nearly always took Carlo with him. Returning to winter quarters in 1436, John Francis gave more than usual offence to Louis by slighting him and showing a marked preference for Carlo. Louis fell into one of his fits of brooding despondency, leaving the company of his parents and friends, and taking solitary walks,

while he shared his troubles with no one. The Marchioness, with a mother's instinct, was alarmed, and endeavoured to rouse her son, but in vain. Vittorino was quietly watching Louis, for it had often been his duty to interfere when matters came to a crisis.

One day Louis was missing altogether. There was at first no anxiety on his account, but when night came on and he did not appear, the Marchioness and Vittorino instituted a search carried out by trusted servants, who knew the ways and the haunts of their young lord. They returned without having found him, bringing the information that he had been seen riding out by the north gate in the early morning, attended by his valet. The night was passed in suspense, and next day it became necessary to tell the Marquis of the absence of his son. He also had remarked the moodiness of Louis, but had been too angry with him to pay any attention to what he considered his dull, inactive disposition. Now, however, he became thoroughly alarmed, and sent couriers out in all direc-

tions to make inquiries and to search for the missing youth.

In the evening Vittorino was called to speak to a woman of the city, who wished to see him on urgent business. With fright in her eyes, she told him that her son, who was a soldier in the pay of the Marquis, had come to her with news that the young lord had gone to Milan, no one knew for what purpose, but all feared that some mischief was brewing. She had asked to see Vittorino rather than the Marquis or his lady, because she feared to tell them, lest vengeance should fall upon her son for bringing such ill tidings. Vittorino was dismayed and knew not what to do, for the thought of the infatuated young man having placed himself in the power of the Visconti was too alarming to be faced. Never before had he been in such a dilemma. If he told the Marquis, he knew that a storm of rage would be the result; if he kept the secret and tried privately to negotiate with the young Prince and the Lord of Milan, he feared the consequences. He resolved at any rate to take counsel of the night,

and to pray fervently that the best course might be followed by himself and all concerned.

In the morning, after Mass and devotions, Vittorino asked for a private interview with the Marchioness. She was in deep distress at the disappearance of her son, and her anxiety was not by any means relieved by the grave aspect of the tutor. To her eager inquiry as to whether he brought news, he replied that her son was living, but that he had gone to Milan to the Visconti, the worst enemies of his House. The Marchioness, relieved from suspense, was at first overjoyed to hear of her son's safety, but upon a little consideration the whole terror of the situation came upon her. The action of Louis, whatever might have been its motive, was fraught with most serious consequences. If the Prince had put himself into the power of the Lord of Milan, his life was scarcely safe; if, on the contrary, he had made overtures of friendship to the Visconti, his father would most certainly use his right as sovereign prince against his unworthy son.

In either case the mother shuddered at the thought of what might befall Louis.

Both the Marchioness and Vittorino decided that it was useless to put off the revelation any longer. In pity for the distressed lady, the tutor offered to be the bearer of the sad news to the Marquis. It required no ordinary courage to undertake such a task; but Vittorino was a man of upright intention and straightforward speech, and when he had a duty to perform he feared neither angry looks nor passionate words. It was not the first time that he had gone on a disagreeable message to the Marquis, though never before had anything so serious occurred. As he expected, the information was received with an explosion of wrath, which showed that however civilised the Marquis had become, the old condottiere spirit was in him still. He fumed with anger, and swore that his degenerate son should forfeit for ever any right he might have possessed to his patrimony. If Louis ever dared to return he would cast him into prison and obtain an order from the Emperor for his immediate

execution on a charge of high treason. He was no son of his, and might remain at Milan with the Visconti, and fight against his own father in the ranks of his enemies, if he chose.

Vittorino listened calmly to the first ravings of passionate indignation. He felt that there was, indeed, some foundation for legitimate anger against a son who had so far forgotten his duty towards his parents and his native city as to league with their sworn foes. Yet the father had also been greatly in fault, and Vittorino had often begged him to treat Louis more leniently. As soon as he found that the Marquis had somewhat exhausted himself, he began gently to represent to him that, after all, they were not in full possession of the facts of the case. It was even possible that the boy had been decoyed to Milan by some stratagem of the enemy, and that he was kept there by force. It would be time enough to resort to extreme measures when it was known to be true that the Prince had deserted his father.

The Marquis at length became calmer,

and consented to see his wife, who tried to soothe him by every means in her power. They made up their minds to wait for further enlightenment, and to leave the task of inquiry to Vittorino, who lost no time in sending messengers to find out the real state of the case. The information, when it came, confirmed the worst suspicions. Louis had, indeed, gone over to the enemy's camp, and had no intention whatever of returning to a father by whom he believed himself to have been wronged. Another outburst of rage on the part of the Marquis followed this revelation. The whole house was plunged in grief and desolation. The angry father applied to the Emperor Sigismund for full power over the life and succession of his son. With this permission he might be tried and condemned by the High Court of Mantua for treason against the State. John Francis even prepared with more ardour than usual for a campaign against Milan, hoping that he might take his son prisoner, and thus be enabled to carry out his plans for vengeance.

Vittorino was inconsolable. All the

labours of his life in Mantua seemed to have ended in disastrous failure. He knew that it was useless at present to make any further tentatives of reconciliation, but he did not abandon all hope. If he could bide his time, he might be able to seize some opportunity of exercising his influence. Meantime the affair was noised abroad, and various persons expostulated with both father and son. Among these was the tactless scholar Poggio, who wrote several letters on the subject, which are still extant.

One of these epistles is to the Marquis, reproving him severely for his treatment of his son. The Prince had, he acknowledged, done wrong, but his father had dealt too harshly with him before the offence, and was now acting foolishly. After all, the crime was not, as the Marquis thought, against the State, but a private matter between parent and child. Poggio pompously assured John Francis that he was giving him very good advice (in the best Latin, too, he let it be understood) in recommending him to show mercy, and added that the young man had injured no

one except himself and his own future prospects.

This letter was enclosed in one to Vittorino, who was requested, after having admired it, to deliver it to the Marquis. The tutor deliberated for more than two months as to whether he should comply with this request, for it seemed to him that the magnificent language of Poggio would only add fuel to the fire which was already blazing in the mind of John Francis. Finally he presented the letter. The Marquis would not look at it, but ordered that it should be at once returned to the writer. This was done, to the intense disgust of Poggio, who did not fail to pour out the vials of his indignation on Vittorino, and his contempt on the Marquis, for his uncivil treatment of so learned a man as himself. As it was not a pleasant thing for any one to have Poggio's pungent pen directed against him, he was conciliated and induced to forgive the slight put upon him.

The sojourn of Louis at Milan was leading to political complications which could

not be ignored. The consideration of these difficulties, joined to the arguments of Vittorino, and the entreaties and tears of the Lady Paola, at last brought the Marquis to a more serene state of mind. He revoked his decision with regard to disinheriting his son, and it is to be believed he had never seriously thought of condemning him to death, though examples of such rude justice were not uncommon among the condottieri. The only punishment now imposed upon the Prince was that he should make a public apology for his conduct. This was not easy to win from the young man, who believed himself to be the aggrieved party. To obtain it, Vittorino and the Marchioness made several journeys with the object of persuading Louis to accept his father's terms and return home. The youth was too unhappy in his exile to hold out long, and at last he yielded. The apology was made; father and son embraced each other with tears, and the peace thus restored to the household was no more to be broken by any misconduct on the part of Louis, who had learnt his lesson, and from that time

was distinguished for his virtues and wisdom and for all princely qualities. He saw life, henceforth, from a different standpoint, and the last traces of jealousy and selfishness disappeared from his character. Vittorino breathed freely once more, and thanked God for this happy deliverance from what might have been a severe blow to his tender and devoted affection for the family of Gonzaga.

The younger children were growing up and improving day by day. Carlo remained passive during the struggle he had unwittingly caused between his father and Louis. He was an impulsive, good-natured lad, with no ambition to supplant his elder brother. There was, in fact, too much of the old condottiere spirit of his ancestors in Carlo to allow of his settling down to the government of a State like Mantua. What he loved was a roaming life, as "soldier, scholar, courtier, gentleman," and as such he always did credit to the education given him in the Joyous House. The same may be said of Gian Lucido, though in him the scholar predominated. As for Alexander,

he remained quietly at home, for his health was always too delicate to allow of travel, or of entering public life in any capacity. It is a curious fact that Louis, who had seemed the least likely of all Vittorino's pupils to make a mark in the world, was the only one who left a name on the pages of political history. His fame has come down to posterity as one of the best rulers of Mantua, and it is to Vittorino's credit that from Louis came, in direct line of descent, the holy youth St. Aloysius Gonzaga, of whose grandfather, to put it in simple terms, Louis was the grandfather.

The sweetest and brightest flower of Vittorino's garden was that little Cecilia whose Greek, when she was only ten years old, was a wonder to Ambrose Traversari. As with her Greek, so it was with every other accomplishment suitable to her age and sex. Vittorino took infinite pains to train every faculty and to develop it to its full extent, without interfering with any of the gentler arts practised by the ladies of the fifteenth century, such as embroidery,

painting and music. Besides this, she was obliged to take exercise, to learn riding and dancing, and the proper deportment of a great lady. By the time she was sixteen her extraordinary beauty and talents were spoken of in all the courts of Italy, and her hand was sought by some of the highest princes of the land. The scholars and poets who had seen her in the Joyous House or with her mother in the Gonzaga palace were loud in her praise, and many references to her may still be found in the writings of the period.

But Cecilia was untouched by all that the world could offer her, for she had other thoughts, which she confided to her mother and to her beloved tutor. In the city of Mantua was a convent of Poor Clares, founded by the Marchioness, and a favourite resort with her and her daughter. The attraction of Cecilia to these holy religious was so long-standing that she could not remember when it had first seized upon her childish mind. Like many other little girls, she had told our Lord on the day of her first communion that she would be a nun

and live entirely for Him. That promise, which is so often forgotten in later years, "when the world seems soft and fair," was a sacred one to Cecilia, and instead of being a tie upon her, was the joy of her life. These were the days when the memory of St. Catherine of Siena was fresh and living throughout Italy, and many were the maidens who followed her example. To Cecilia nothing was more pleasing than the thought of the austerity of the cloister, where she could live a life more hidden, but not less crucified, than that of the thorn-crowned Catherine. She was encouraged in these holy aspirations by her mother and Vittorino, who were both delighted that she should be drawn to give herself to God in religion.

The Marquis of Gonzaga was desirous of entering into a friendly alliance with the city of Urbino, whose lord at that time was Oddantonio of Montefeltro. It seemed that the best way of bringing about and cementing this alliance was to bestow the hand of his daughter on that Prince, whose vanity was flattered by the prospect of obtaining

The Death of Vittorino da Feltre. [p. 170

as his bride a young lady so renowned for wit, beauty and accomplishments as Cecilia Gonzaga. John Francis, nothing doubting, sent for the girl one morning, and after entering into conversation on the subject of her education, which must now be nearly completed, and the obligation she was under of submitting to her parents' wishes with regard to marriage, broached the point of his desire that she should acquiesce in his choice of the Count of Montefeltro.

Had Cecilia been acquainted with the gossip and scandal of the day she would have known that her proposed husband was one of the most atrocious specimens of the unreclaimed condottiere chieftains of Italy. But she was quite innocent, and ignorant of all worldly news, and respected her father's judgment far too much to make any objections on this head. Nevertheless, her mind was fully made up, not that she would refuse Oddantonio only, but that nothing would induce her to give up a union with the King of Heaven for any earthly marriage. She therefore expressed

no objection to the Lord of Urbino, but respectfully told her father that she would never marry, since she had decided to enter a religious order. She was sufficiently on her guard not to mention the convent proposed, lest the vengeance of the Marquis should blot it out from Mantua, for she saw his indignation rising at her firm and gentle words. It was in vain that he made use of promises, persuasions and threats; the girl was invincible, and in a storm of passion he strode from the room, and sought his wife that he might engage her to assist him in overcoming the resolution of his refractory daughter.

The Marchioness pleaded the youth of Cecilia, and suggested that she should have time to consider the question. She pacified her irate husband as best she could, and endeavoured to protect her daughter from his anger. Cecilia was perfectly calm, and showed neither timidity nor undue obstinacy. She was as a rock in the midst of an angry sea, set inalterably upon its base and unmoved by the shock of the tempest. Her only emotion was sorrow at the pain

her refusal was causing to her beloved father; but even this was tempered by the all-pervading thought that God was calling her. She could but follow in the straight road marked out by Providence; she could see but the star which drew her onwards as the wise men were drawn to Christ The allurements placed in her way were absolutely meaningless to her, so firmly was her heart set upon heavenly things, and upon the thought of the Bridegroom who had chosen her for His own. So it is in the case of every true vocation to the religious state. The pearl of great price, once appreciated at its true value, can never be cast aside for the empty baubles of the world.

Two rather troublous years followed, for the Marquis returned to the charge so often that his wife and Vittorino were obliged to declare their sympathy with Cecilia, and to share the reproaches and threats showered upon her. It was fortunate that there was an outlet for the passionate nature of John Francis in the constant wars he was waging at this time. In the intervals of his ab-

sence on his various campaigns there was peace in Mantua, and work in the Joyous House went on as usual. Pope Eugenius IV was in Florence, driven there by the fury of the Milanese, and the Marquis was fighting on the side of Venice against the Visconti, with the intention of restoring the Holy Father to Rome.

In the year 1443 there was an opportunity of a journey to Florence open to the Marchioness. She accepted it, and accompanied by her daughter and Vittorino she made the journey. It was on this occasion that Vittorino was presented to Pope Eugenius IV, who exclaimed on seeing him: "If my position as Sovereign Pontiff permitted it, I should rise from my throne to do homage to so great a man." The case of Cecilia was laid before His Holiness, who was all attention and sympathy, but counselled patience for the present.

The wisdom of the Pope's advice was soon apparent. In the following year there was mourning and lamentation in the city of Mantua, and most of all in the palace and the Joyous House. The Marquis, who,

in spite of his hasty temper, was a benevolent man, and much loved by his family and subjects, was dead. Vittorino wept for him no less than did his wife and children, for he loved the master who had treated him so generously and had accepted his rebukes and counsels so nobly. This was the beginning of a new order of things. Louis succeeded without opposition to the marquisate, and proved a beneficent and wise ruler.

Vittorino was growing old, and felt that his teaching days were over. All his dear children had left school, and it was not for him to undertake new pupils. Cecilia was free to execute her pious project. At eighteen years of age she entered the convent of Poor Clares at Mantua, sacrificing willingly and joyfully all the worldly advantages to which her youth, beauty and remarkable abilities entitled her. There were tears shed by her mother and Vittorino at the ceremony of her reception, but they were tears of joy and of gratitude to God for having so mercifully preserved this dear child from the contagion of the world. It

was not long before the Lady Paola joined her daughter in the convent, where she spent her last years in the most edifying piety. Cecilia fades henceforth from the pages of history, but she lived all the more to the citizens of the heavenly kingdom, until the time came for her to join the ranks of the virgins who follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth.

As for the discomfited Oddantonio of Urbino, he was obliged to make the best of his disappointment, and was not left long to continue his wicked career. The men of his city became so weary of his excesses that they rebelled against him and put him to death. He was succeeded by his half-brother Frederic, who, curiously enough, had been a pupil of Vittorino at the Joyous House. This young Prince, having been taken prisoner by the Venetians, was sent to continue his education at Mantua during the period of his captivity. On being set at liberty he was found to have profited so well by the lessons of Vittorino that he showed himself mild, just and equitable in his dealings with all men.

His bravery was only equalled by his generosity and nobility of soul, and no other prince of Urbino ever attained to the high standard of excellence which all historians attribute to Frederic. His gratitude to Vittorino for his devotedness to him when a little prisoner of war in the Joyous House was testified by the following inscription beneath the master's portrait in the palace of Montefeltro: "This is placed here by Frederic in honour of Vittorino da Feltre, his saintly master, who by word and example instructed him in all human excellence."

Another of Vittorino's pupils, who was connected with the struggle of Cecilia Gonzaga to follow out her vocation, was Gregorio Corraro, a highly-cultured, able and eloquent scholar, who wrote a treatise for the express purpose of encouraging her to perseverance. This book, couched in the most elegant classical Latin, was entitled *De Contemptu Mundi* ("On the Contempt of the World"), and was not improbably read later by Cecilia's holy kinsman, St. Aloysius Gonzaga, whose steadfast-

ness in his vocation was very similar to hers.

Vittorino had always enjoyed extremely good health, notwithstanding his early privations, the austerity of his later life, and the continuous labour to which he devoted himself. His hair was grey, but his small, spare figure was straight and agile; he seemed to have many more years of good work before him. But, in the year 1444, when the death of the Marquis, John Francis, prevented him from leaving Mantua for the hill-country, he had an attack of malarial fever, which left him very feeble. The strength of his constitution enabled him to recover from the fever, but the weakness continued, and he was obliged to abate much of his usual labour. He still worked quietly in his library, and corresponded with his learned friends and his former pupils; but his energy was gone, and he felt more disposed to retire into secluded spots for prayer than to join in the sports of the young or in the discussions of older men.

He met with the kindest attentions on

every side. His old disciple, Louis, now Lord of Mantua, was assiduous in his care of his beloved master. All that wealth could do to restore his strength was at his disposal; but Vittorino had done his work, and in him, as in a candle burnt to the socket, only fitful flickers of life remained. He became more and more united to God in heavenly contemplation as time went on. Gleams from the celestial country visited him, and often he seemed rapt in ecstasy. All was peace and calm in that beautiful sunset of a beautiful career. Vittorino, though perhaps he did not think so himself, had nothing to regret, nothing to wish undone, no false step to grieve over in the years that lay behind him. The secret of the joy that filled his soul with pure and gentle radiance lay in the fact that all through life he had sought to know the Will of God in his regard, and to accomplish it to the letter.

In the summer of 1446 he was again attacked by fever. The physicians despaired of him from the first, and, though he suffered little pain, he was gradually

wasting away. His faculties remained clear and collected to the end, and he dictated messages to the dear friends and pupils whom he had not seen. Guarino was still living, but, though vigorous for his age, did not feel equal to the journey from Ferrara to Mantua. Carlo and Gian Lucido came to say their farewells; Louis and Alexander were always there. The Lady Paola and Cecilia sent affectionate messages, promising increased prayers from themselves and all the Sisters of St. Clare. Vittorino replied that he would await them in heaven. He was still ready for an innocent jest, and always had a smile upon his lips. The school of life was over, and he was setting out for his eternal holiday, not in Goito or by Garda's shore, but in the heavenly kingdom. Why, then, should he not be joyful?

Vittorino asked for the last sacraments, and they were administered to him by the Observantine Father who had been his friend and confessor. Then he blessed his weeping pupils as they knelt around his bed, and in serene contentment he patiently

awaited the signal: "Depart, Christian soul." Never was there a more beautiful death, and seldom has a soul more pure and perfect appeared before the Judgment Seat of God. If the doom of him who scandalises a little one of Christ be more terrible than if a millstone were hanged about his neck and he were cast into the sea, how glorious must be the reward of the man who instructed so many unto justice, and who might say in the words of our Lord, "Those whom thou gavest me I have kept, and not one of them is lost." As far as history can tell us the secrets of salvation, no soul confided to Vittorino's entire care ever went astray from the path of righteousness.

One request had been made by the dying man, a request that speaks volumes on the hidden story of his life. He asked to be buried in Mantua by the side of his mother. No mention is made of Monda Rambaldoni in any other part of her son's life since his departure from Feltre. But she must have been one of those beautiful souls whose price, according to Holy Writ, is above

rubies and pearls; a valiant woman whose children rose up and called her blessed, and whose greatest honour it was to be the mother of such a son. She had passed the years of her widowhood in Mantua, and though Vittorino had but little time to devote to her, he provided for her, and she had the consolation of seeing his honourable life and of hearing his praises on the lips of all. His last wish was complied with, and side by side mother and son sleep their last sleep until the trumpet of judgment awakes them.

Father Ambrose Traversari, Superior-General of the Camaldolese Order, preached the panegyric of his deceased friend. He expressed his admiration for the humble scholar, so different from many of his contemporaries, who, as he sadly confessed, had neither the charity of Christians nor the good manners of cultured pagans. In Vittorino he had found heroic charity, with lively faith and firm hope; the prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance of the true Christian, and that love of the counsels of perfection in their highest degree which

transforms the Catholic layman into a saint of God. These and many other praises were spoken over the grave of the humble Vittorino, to whom his native city erected a tardy monument in the year 1868, inscribing on its base these words—

"To Vittorino, the Prince of Teachers."

THE END

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